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# TRAVELLER

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# INDIA

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WITH BENGAL  
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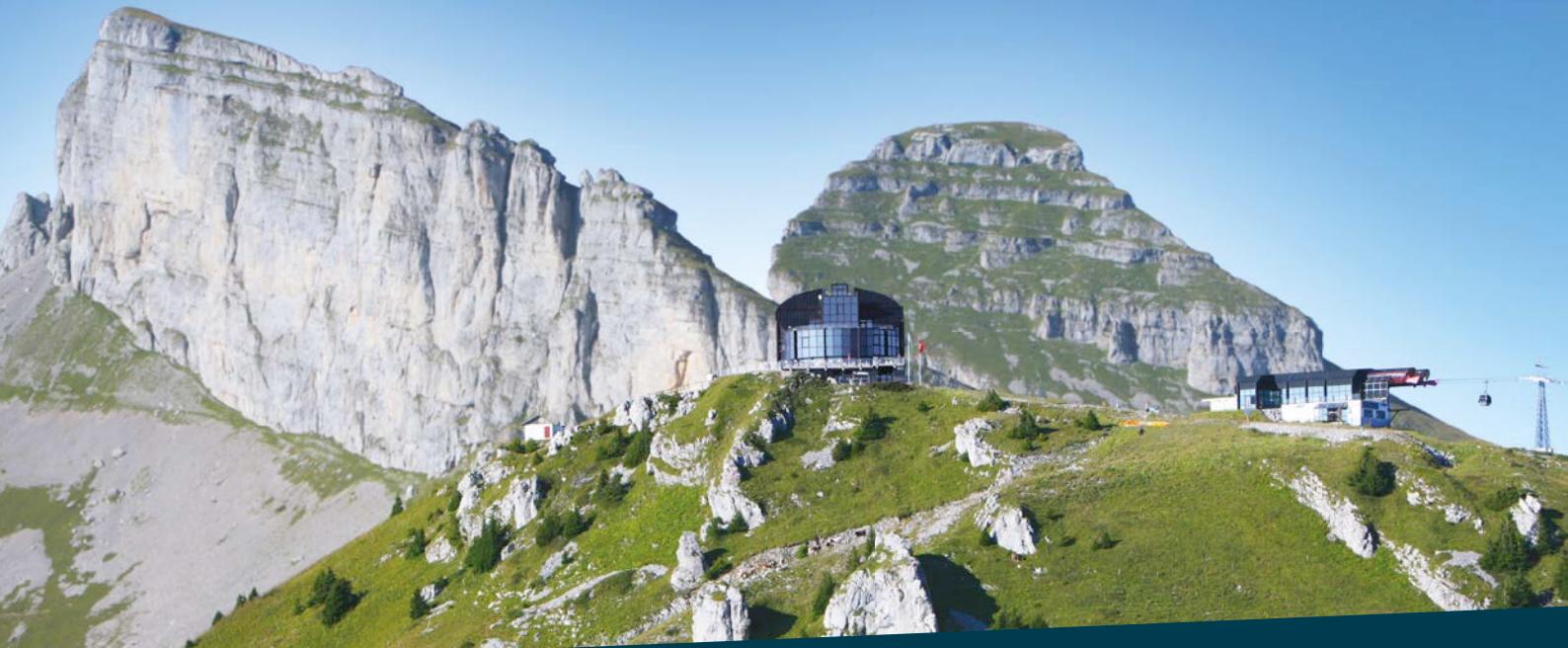
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October  
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Tiger siblings,  
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Park, Rajasthan, India  
**IMAGE:** Getty

October  
2018

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## PHOTOGRAPHY COMPETITION 2019

Calling all photographers — is this your year? See p.10



A new hotel  
opening this winter



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City

225 Bowery, New York  
[sistercitynyc.com](http://sistercitynyc.com)  
[@sistercitynyc](https://www.instagram.com/sistercitynyc)

# Contributors



## Nina Caplan

Australia's interior deserves more attention, especially from wine lovers. Driving through southern Australia, I travelled through a series of scenic wine regions, the country changing as much in your glass as through the windscreen. **AUSTRALIA P.94**



## Nigel Tisdall

Next year marks the 200th anniversary of the discovery of Antarctica, but I still felt like an explorer when I took a cruise through its bewitching landscapes. It might be freezing down there, but you'll come back loving this world even more. **ANTARCTICA P.106**



## Pól Ó Conghaile

"Even though I live here, I feel like a traveller," one local told me. And it's true — I knew there would be surprises in Tokyo. What I didn't know was just how personable this mega-city could be... once you start sharing meals with people. **TOKYO P.132**



## Amelia Duggan

Of all the cities I've called home, Santiago takes the crown. And despite a recent flurry of funky cosmopolitan openings, I was thrilled to return and find that Santiago's artsy, bohemian barrios and big-hearted vibe stays the same. **SANTIAGO P.142**



## Sarah Barrell

Birding's no longer the preserve of middle-aged men in beige. As an opportunist rather than a wannabe ornithologist, I loved being beneath the big skies of the 'avian migratory motorway' near Málaga, spotting 100 bird species in a day. **BIRDING P.166**



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## Editor's letter

With a human population of over 1.3 billion — many crammed into sprawling metropolises — and rich and colourful religious, cultural and culinary traditions bursting into life around every corner, it's easy to see why India's wildlife is sometimes overlooked. But the subcontinent offers up enough for a lifetime of nature holidays, from impressive megafauna to exotic birds.

So, in this issue, we head out on the kind of safari that doesn't always grab the headlines. We uncover the very best places to spot Bengal tigers, track snow leopards, glimpse one-horned rhinos and spy sloth bears. And aside from these big hitters, the supporting cast is equally impressive, including barking deer and a dizzying bird species tally.

A wildlife trip to India is a unique and often sustainable experience. This is the last place on Earth, for example, where you can see endangered Asiatic lions, just one of the creatures whose habitat has been protected by ground-breaking conservation initiatives. And with many other at-risk populations slowly starting to recover, isn't it time you put India on your safari map?

PAT RIDDELL, EDITOR

@patridgell  
 @patridgell

### HIGHLIGHTS



#### South America guide

From the Andes to the Amazon, our free 76-page guide to the continent has plenty of inspiration for your next adventure.



#### Photography Competition 2019

Whether you're an amateur or professional, has your shot got what it takes to be the winner this year? (p.10).



#### Reader Awards 2018

Time's running out to vote in our annual awards. Vote for your favourites today and be in with a chance to win a fantastic prize (p.43).

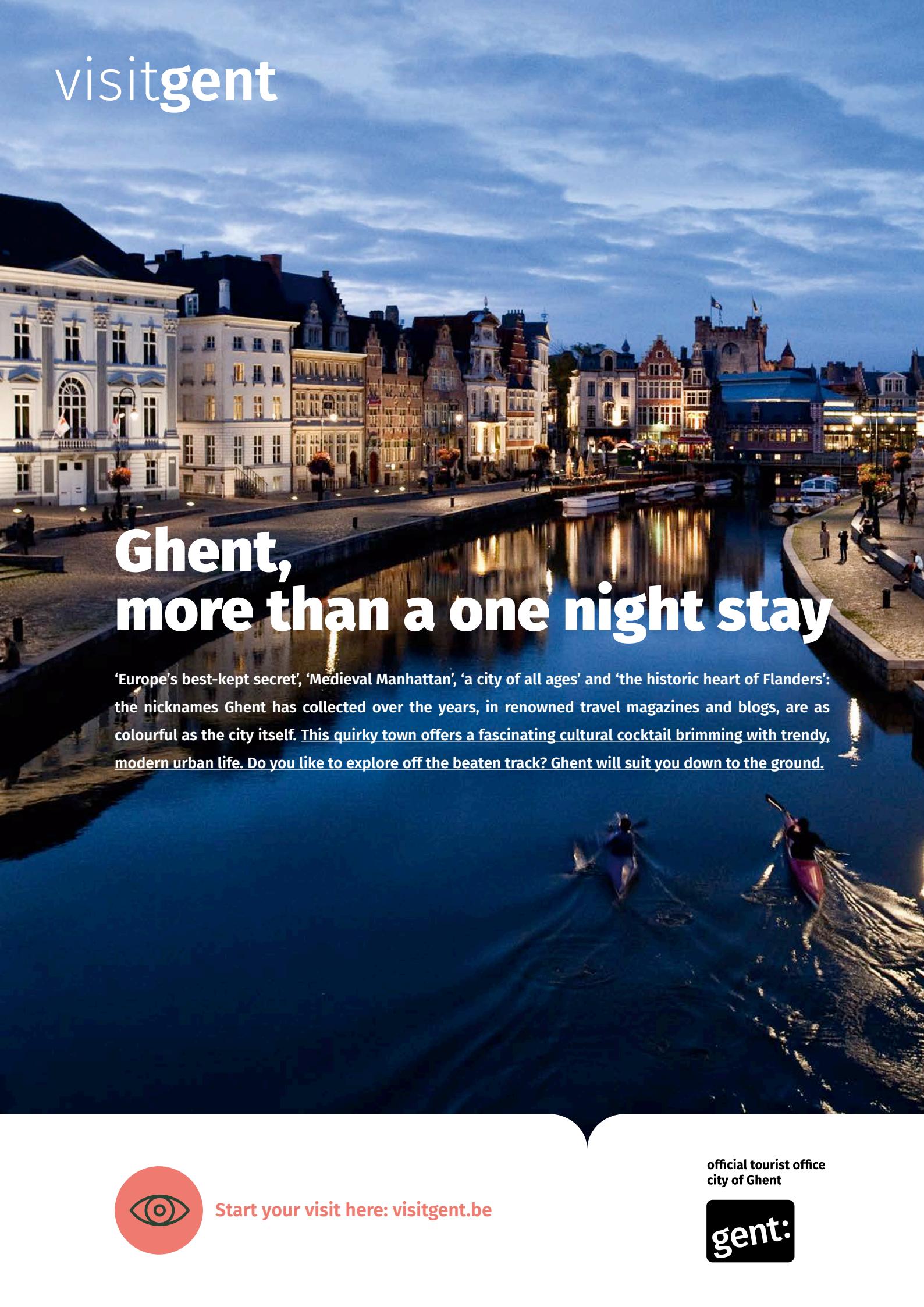


#### Reader offers

Check out the latest deal to iconic Victoria and the Great Ocean Road from our reader offer partners, Flight Centre (p.105).

### AWARD-WINNING NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC TRAVELLER

Visit USA Media Awards 2018: Best Consumer Travel Magazine Feature • BSME Talent Awards 2018: Best Designer • LATA Media Awards 2018: Consumer Magazine Feature of the Year • France Travel Media Awards 2018: Best Wine & Gastronomy Feature • ATJA Travel Media Awards 2017: Photography: Overall Excellence — Print Publication • British Travel Awards 2017: Best Consumer Holiday Magazine • British Guild of Travel Writers Awards 2017: Best Travel Writer • British Guild of Travel Writers Awards 2016: Best Travel Writer • British Travel Awards 2015: Best Consumer Holiday Magazine • British Travel Awards 2014: Best Consumer Holiday Magazine



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## Ghent, more than a one night stay

'Europe's best-kept secret', 'Medieval Manhattan', 'a city of all ages' and 'the historic heart of Flanders': the nicknames Ghent has collected over the years, in renowned travel magazines and blogs, are as colourful as the city itself. This quirky town offers a fascinating cultural cocktail brimming with trendy, modern urban life. Do you like to explore off the beaten track? Ghent will suit you down to the ground.



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## **OUR ANNUAL PHOTOGRAPHY COMPETITION IS NOW OPEN**

Have you got the winning shot for 2019? Novice or pro, simply submit in your preferred category – single shot or portfolio – and you'll be in with a chance of winning a commission



## **THE CATEGORIES** **CITIES, FOOD, NATURE, PEOPLE & PORTFOLIO**

Upload your photos in one of four single shot themes, or submit up to 10 shots based on the same subject or theme into the portfolio category

## **THE PRIZES**

### **GRAND-PRIZE WINNER**

#### **Slovakia Lakes and Mountains**

The grand-prize winner will join Tatra Photography in the Tatra Mountains of Slovakia for a masterclass in landscape techniques and photography filtration. Supported by Lee Filters, whose high-quality polarisers and filters will be available throughout trip, the workshop will be led by award-winning tutor Justin Minns, visiting the best locations in this spectacularly wild corner of Europe. Through careful research, Tatra has organised the ideal itinerary to make the most of the rugged, pristine beauty at all times of day, as well as a masterclass in the likes of composition, shutter speeds and apertures. [tatraphotographyworkshop.com](http://tatraphotographyworkshop.com)

### **PORTRAIT WINNER**

#### **French Alps**

The portfolio winner and a guest will jet off to Chamonix for seven-night escape amid the picture-perfect peaks of the French Alps, courtesy of lakes and mountains specialists, Inghams. From hiking and biking to rock climbing and canyoning, the prize offers plenty of inspiration for your next portfolio. [ingham.co.uk](http://ingham.co.uk)

### **CATEGORY WINNERS**

#### **Manfrotto Befree Advanced Travel Tripod**

Winners of each category will receive a Manfrotto Befree Advanced Aluminium Travel Tripod worth £175. It has three independent ergonomic controls and a side pull selector for a quick and easy setup. [manfrotto.co.uk](http://manfrotto.co.uk)



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# SMART TRAVELLER

*What's new // Do it now // Food // On the trail // Rooms // Family // Stay at home // The word*

## SNAPSHOT

### *Sandun, Unawatuna*

I was travelling in Sri Lanka, tracing the circular route that starts and ends in the capital, Colombo. On Unawatuna Beach, famed for its palm trees and coral reefs, I met Sandun. He's a local who works at a shop on the beach selling roti, a kind of local flatbread. We talked about his life; his love of football and basketball; and the Honda scooter that he rides around town with pride. But what struck me most was how he described the changing face of his hometown — tourism and building work have completely transformed the landscape he grew up; with recent initiatives for the better.

**MAREK PUC // PHOTOGRAPHER**





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## IN NUMBERS

**DA NANG  
GOLDEN  
BRIDGE, BÀ  
NÀ HILLS,  
VIETNAM**



**\$2 billion**

invested in the bridge's construction

**150**

the length of the walkway, in metres

**1,400**

metres above sea level

**1.5 million**

people visit the Bà Nà Hills area every year **ZARA SEKHAVATI**

# Editors' picks

We've been here and we've been there, and our team have found a few things we thought we'd share

## WHAT WE'VE BEEN WATCHING

Dark Tourist

**STEPHANIE CAVAGNARO**

The Vietnam War, with Ken Burns

**PAT RIDDELL**

Hannah Gadsby: Nanette

**TAMSIN WRESSELL**

Great Indian Railway

Journeys, with Michael Portillo

**CHARLOTTE**

WIGRAM-EVANS



## Back in business

Deep-pocketed travellers can live in the lap of luxury this October, when Richard Branson's paradise idyll Necker Island reopens for business. With a spa, watersports, tennis and luxury dining options on offer, couples can expect to pay a cool £10,356 per couple for a three-night stay.

[virginlimitededition.com](http://virginlimitededition.com)

**CONNOR MCGOVERN**

## It's an art

For the first time ever, Bangkok is welcoming an arts biennale.

Kicking off on 19 October, the Thai capital will be awash with art — much of which has been commissioned for the city's myriad temples and monuments, with works by artists as diverse as Jean-Michel Basquiat and Marina Abramović.

[bkkartbiennale.com](http://bkkartbiennale.com)

**JOSEPHINE PRICE**



## TOP 3

## Spooky walking tours

**BRISTOL**

Start this tour at the cathedral and walk the city's darker and creepier historical and on-screen environs, from haunted cinemas to filming locations for *Being Human* and *Skins*.

[hauntedandhiddenbristol.co.uk](http://hauntedandhiddenbristol.co.uk)

**LINCOLN**

Expert-led ghost walks are held throughout Lincoln's Cathedral Quarter year-round, while the new Halloween Ghost Tour offers insight into the city's supernatural past from an open-top bus.

[visitlincoln.com/ghost-tours](http://visitlincoln.com/ghost-tours)

**LONDON**

There's no murderer more notorious than Jack the Ripper. Follow the serial killer's tracks through east London on this atmospheric, terrifying tour.

[jack-the-ripper-tours.com](http://jack-the-ripper-tours.com)

**MARIA PIERI**



**BIG PICTURE****Mekong Delta, Vietnam**

Every morning on the vast and bustling Mekong Delta, vendors from the surrounding river villages navigate their way through the chaos to the Phong Dien Floating Market to sell their wares. The colourful spectacle — which takes place just southwest of Can Tho — is at its most lively in the hours just after sunrise, when traders and customers barter loudly from their rocking wooden boats. Yet, despite the noise and commotion, there's an almost romantic air to this captivating scene.

**NICO AVELARDI // PHOTOGRAPHER**

→ nicoavelardi.com  
@nico.avelardi



## SLEEPER TRAINS

# Sweet dreams

**Forget flights, it's time to get on board and bed down on the UK's revamped sleeper trains**

You'd be forgiven for thinking no-frills airlines had meant the end of sleeper trains. While it's true many overnight services have gone the way of the *Orient Express* — as gleaming, luxurious incarnations — sleeper cars are making a bit of a comeback. Whether it's down to a more eco-minded attitude or the trend for slow travel, we're getting back on board with the nostalgic old-timers. Just in time, as the UK's sleeper trains have had a serious facelift.

### CALEDONIAN SLEEPER

Heading north of the border? This month, the *Caledonian Sleeper* is introducing its first new trains in more than 30 years. Initially on the 'lowland' routes to Edinburgh and Glasgow, the new trains will start serving stations in the Highlands from early 2019. And it's all change on board: sleeper compartments come with hotel-style keycards, adjustable thermostats and free wi-fi, with en suite shower rooms available in the higher categories. If you want to splash out, upgrade to a suite and you'll also get a double bed — a first in the UK. There's good news for wheelchair users, too, as each train comes with an accessible room. Feeling peckish? Head to the smart Club Car with its suitably Scotland-centric food menu on offer. [sleeper.scot](http://sleeper.scot)



### DID YOU KNOW?

The UK's first sleeper car set off in February 1873, on a train from Glasgow to London King's Cross



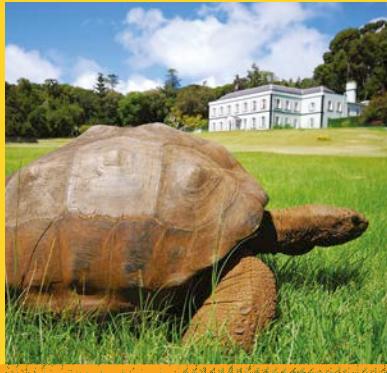
### NIGHT RIVIERA

Great Western Railway recently revamped all the sleeper carriages on its *Night Riviera* service between Cornwall and the capital. It opened new station lounges at Truro and Penzance, too, where travellers can jump in the shower before catching a train. On board, the new compartments are kitted out with basins and, like the *Caledonian Sleeper*, have modern keycard door locks, air conditioning and free wi-fi, plus USB charging points. There's a wheelchair-accessible room on each service, and the first of the *Night Riviera*'s new cocktail-style lounge bars has just opened too, with more on the way. [gwr.com](http://gwr.com)

NICOLA TRUP



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## MALTA'S NEW TRAIL

# Deep dive

**Take the plunge and get up close to the islands' historical and natural wonders**

What do caves, wrecks, reefs and ruins have in common? They've all been incorporated into a new diving trail that weaves around the balmy isles of the Maltese archipelago: Malta, Gozo and Comino. Following the launch of its Gastro Trail last year, the island state that's oft hailed as one of world's best dive destinations is enabling divers of all abilities to immerse themselves in its history. By downloading a map to guide them through the country's best dive sites, visitors can take in the vestiges of the island's wartime past, from the wreck of the *HMS Maori* — a Second World War destroyer that sits at an easy 36-50ft below the surface — to the near-intact Bristol Blenheim bomber, both of which are just off the coast. There are also the remains of the iconic Azure Window, which collapsed into the sea last year off Gozo and is now a self-sculpted maze of canyons and rock formations. And for some serious scuba, there's the geological wonder of the Blue Hole, entered through an underwater arch and teeming with fish. Looks like it's time to dig out those flippers. [maltauk.com/divetrail](http://maltauk.com/divetrail)

**i**  
**LOOK OUT FOR...**  
Christ of the Sailors.  
The concrete-covered  
fibreglass statue of Jesus was  
placed off the coast of Malta  
in 1990 to commemorate  
the visit of Pope John  
Paul II



## GO DEEPER...

### AUSTRALIA

You can still marvel at underwater wrecks without getting your flippers wet. Tangatours launched its Illuminated Wrecks Tour earlier this year off the coast of Queensland. The LED lights of the company's glass-bottom boat shine a light on 15 (deliberately) sunken ships as well as reef fish, dolphins, shovel-nose rays and turtles. [tangatours.com.au](http://tangatours.com.au)

### MALDIVES

See things in a new light — literally — by trying out fluoro snorkelling at Hurawalhi Island Resort in the Maldives. The new experience takes guests out after dark to admire fluorescing anemones with neon colours filtered through special equipment. [hurawalhi.com](http://hurawalhi.com)

### ST LUCIA

Want to take some sub-aqua snaps? Jade Mountain and Anse Chastanet resorts on the Caribbean island are offering week-long underwater photography courses this year, with lessons in composition, catching ambient light and animal portraits. [jademountain.com](http://jademountain.com) [ansechastanet.com](http://ansechastanet.com)

**TAMSIN WRESSELL**

### IN NUMBERS

#### AZURE WINDOW

**92**

the height in feet  
of the arch before  
it collapsed during  
stormy weather

**1998**

the year it was  
added to Malta's  
tentative list of  
World Heritage Sites

**500**

the estimated time  
in years it took for  
the limestone arch  
to form

**1,500**

the amount, in  
euros, tourists were  
fined for walking  
over the arch

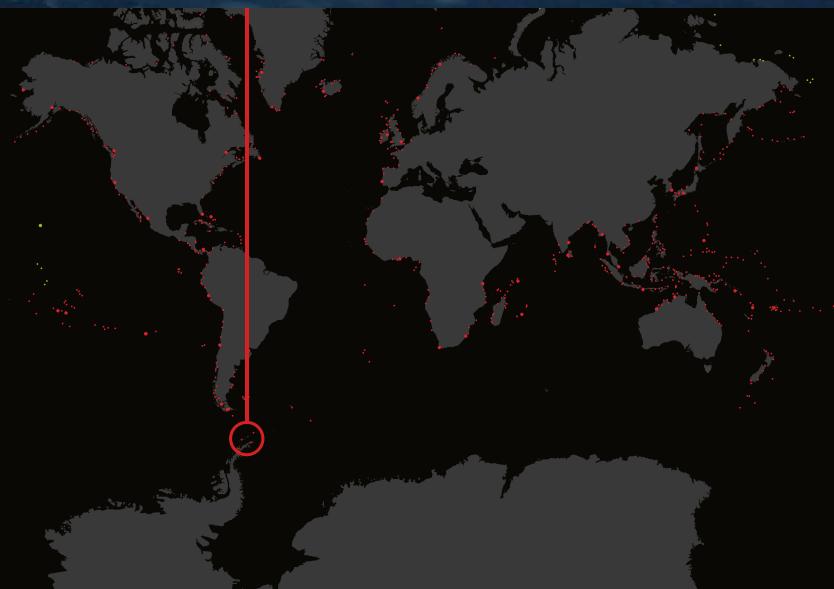


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Lisbon

# HOT HOOD

**Lisbon's Príncipe Real, a once overlooked hilltop district, is now stealing the show**

With no metro or tram stop, it's perhaps little wonder that few travellers make it to hilltop Príncipe Real. But the area is now on the tourist map with the reopening of the exotic **BOTANICAL GARDENS**, Príncipe Real's green heart that recently underwent a year-and-a-half of renovation. And with **LISBON FASHION WEEK** kicking off on 11 October, this *bairro* is ready for its moment in the spotlight. The fair's main pavilion sits on the eastern edge of the neighbourhood, but you don't need to be a VIP to get in on the action. Just step into one of the boutiques on **RUA DA ESCOLA POLITÉCNICA** — you'll find the ateliers of some of the young designers celebrated at this year's Fashion Week here. There's also a gamut of chic stores, such as **NEW BLACK URBAN CONCEPT STORE** last year, and **EMBAIXADA**, a shop housed in a restored Moorish palace stocking everything from handmade shoes to organic skin cream. Whatever your penchant, it's time for this hood's close-up.

[modalisboa.pt](http://modalisboa.pt) [visitlisboa.com](http://visitlisboa.com) SARAH BARRELL

IMAGES: MEMMO; LOCAL RESTAURANT



## TUCK IN Local

Having opened its doors last summer, Local has hit all the right notes with the city's foodie crowd. The tiny 10-seater has a real chef's table buzz, serving a mini menu of creative, modern Portuguese plates dished up with Nordic flare.  
*Rua do Século, 204.*



## DRINK UP Pavilhão Chinês

Don't be fooled by the humble facade — it belies the screwball interior. The 'Chinese Pavilion' has been a local institution since the Eighties, so step inside for cocktails in a bar that's floor-to-ceiling with retro curiosities. [facebook.com/pavilhaochineslisboa](https://www.facebook.com/pavilhaochineslisboa)

## BED DOWN Memmo

The area's pioneering five-star popped up in 2016 and is a 41-room, boutique treat: a modernist palace of cool whose pool, restaurant and rooms — complete with Portuguese tiles — offer VIP views across the city. A port tonic on the terrace is the drink of choice. [memmohotels.com](http://memmohotels.com)



# Skydiving

# LEAP OF FAITH

**Scenic flights may offer incredible views of the world, but jumping out of a plane is an experience like no other**

For many adrenalin junkies, a tandem skydive is high on the list of must-do experiences. There's nothing like the exhilarating free fall followed by the peace and tranquillity of floating beneath a canopy, and with less than 30 minutes training required, it's easier than you might think for a novice. Done it before? Keen to dive solo? Book an Accelerated Free Fall (AFF) course and, in four to five days, you could be leaping out at 12,000 feet on your own.

## WHERE TO TRY IT

**Honiton, Devon:** Skydive Buzz operates three of the fastest jump planes in Europe and offers a jump zone near Honiton. The British Parachute Association-approved centre charges £279 for the 15,000ft tandem skydive or £179 for the 7,000ft dive. [skydiveukltd.com](http://skydiveukltd.com)

**Grand Canyon, Arizona:** Enjoy the iconic site from a plane — and then jump out of it two miles above ground. Bon Voyage offers this as part of a three-night Vegas break at five-star MGM Hotel priced from £1,095 per person, including return flights and skydive. [bon-voyage.co.uk](http://bon-voyage.co.uk)

**Diani, Kenya:** Run by ex-Parachute Regiment veteran Gary Lincoln-Hope, this centre is one of the few places in the world where you can jump over both sea and land. Tandem dives from US\$350 (£270) and AFF courses from US\$2,600 (£2,000). [skydivediani.com](http://skydivediani.com) **SAM LEWIS**



## 15,000ft

is the highest skydive you can do without requiring an oxygen supply

**KEEN TO JUMP ELSEWHERE?**  
Find a safe centre in the UK at [bpa.org.uk](http://bpa.org.uk). For abroad, check out [uspa.org](http://uspa.org)

## Did you know?

The world record for the oldest tandem skydiver in the world was set by Verdun Hayes, who jumped at 101 years and 38 days old

## 7 STEPS TO making the jump



### 1 SWOT UP

A 30-minute safety briefing with an experienced instructor



### 2 GEAR UP

Get fitted with a jumpsuit, headgear, goggles, gloves and harness



### 3 TAKE OFF

Board the aircraft and be securely harnessed to your instructor. Fly up to your chosen altitude



### 4 JUMP

Edge toward the door and launch into the sky after the green light to go



### 5 FREE FALL

Up to 60 seconds of freefall at speeds of approximately 120mph



### 6 ENJOY THE VIEW

The canopy opens, your speed decreases, and you float to earth enjoying the scenery below



### 7 TOUCH DOWN

Help your instructor steer the parachute and land gently

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the Dholak and the Nagara. Dance to beat of the Dandiya  
dance to the claps of the Garba, dance with abandon and joy,  
dance to celebrate the defeat of the demon  
Mahishasura at the hands of **the Goddess Durga.**



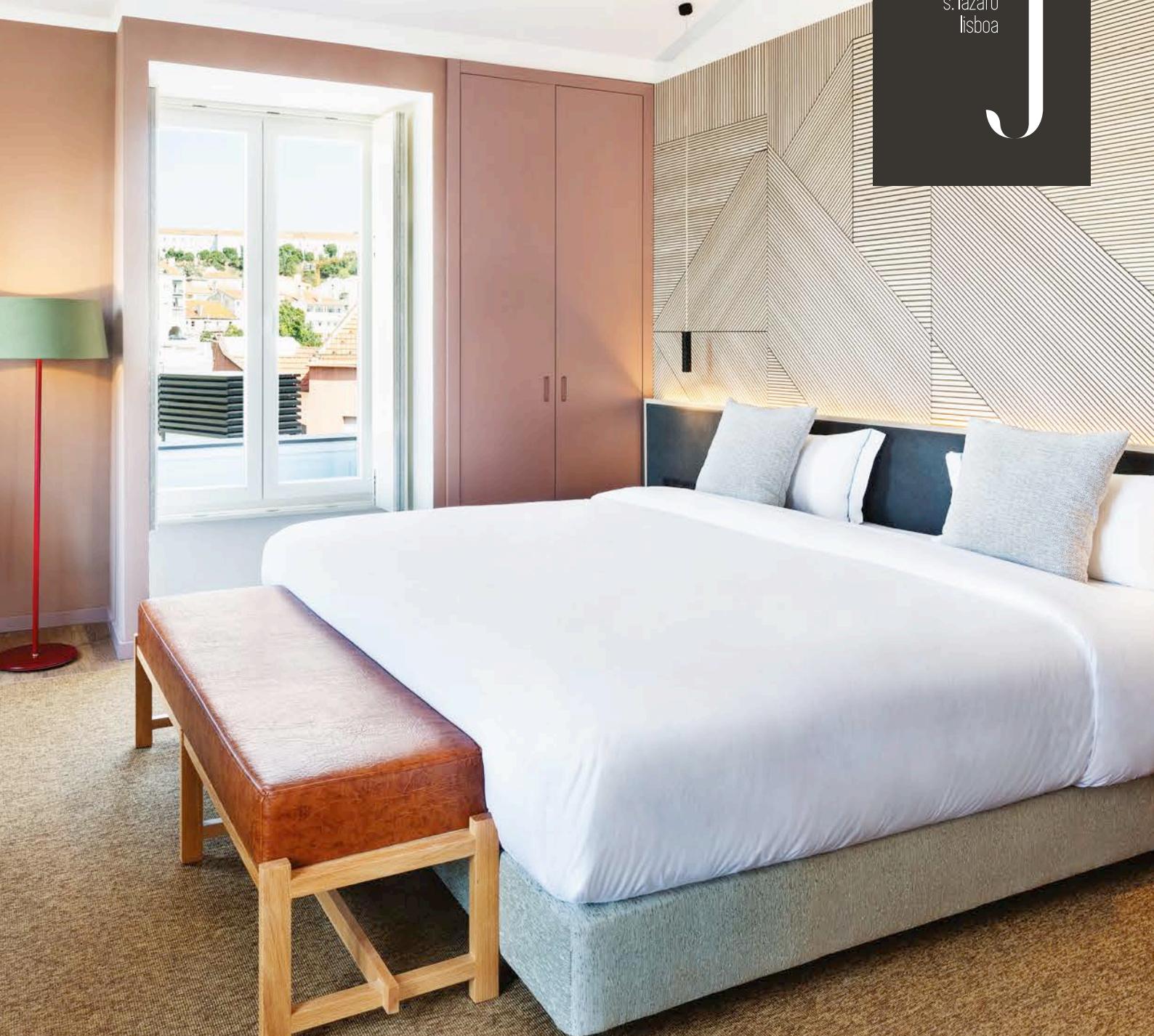
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# A TASTE OF Wales

**From Pembrokeshire to Powys, chef Gareth Ward of Ynyshir restaurant shares his favourite places to eat — and produce to try**

Whether it's strawberries or elder, seaweed or seafood, lamb and beef, Wales is a purveyor of excellent produce — and a beautiful part of the world to boot. What's more, there's never been a more exciting time for the local restaurant scene, with an array of interesting chefs now choosing to base themselves in Wales, many of whom have passed through my kitchen.

**GARETH WARD**  
is chef patron at  
Ynyshir, a Michelin-starred restaurant with  
rooms in Powys, close  
to Wales' west coast.  
[ynyshir.co.uk](http://ynyshir.co.uk)



## WHERE TO EAT

### Harbourmaster, Ceredigion

Right on the harbour in Aberaeron, Cardigan Bay, this place is all about local ingredients and — of course — fresh seafood. It also does wine tasting nights once a month. [harbour-master.com](http://harbour-master.com)

### The Granary, Powys

Headed up by Seamus Russell, who used to work in our kitchen, The Granary focuses on really creative dishes such as *hispi* cabbage 'tacos' with prawn, lime and cucumber, or pig's head with squash, caviar, fermented barley and kelp. [thegranaryrestaurant.co.uk](http://thegranaryrestaurant.co.uk)

### Llys Meddyg, Pembrokeshire

Pembrokeshire has so many good places to eat at the moment. At Llys Meddyg, the menu draws on quality Welsh produce — most ingredients come from within a 50-mile radius. In the summer, it also runs the adjoining Kitchen Garden restaurant, which opens on to a secret garden. [llysmeddyg.com](http://llysmeddyg.com)



**THE PRODUCE**

### Wales' finest

**LAMB**  
The lamb from Rob Rattray's butchers in Aberystwyth is the best. The animals are well treated and that comes across in the flavour. [robattività.co.uk](http://robattività.co.uk)

**GIN**  
Dyfi gin, produced just outside Snowdonia National Park, is perfect with tonic. Danny and Pete Cameron create all the gins themselves. [dyfidistillery.com](http://dyfidistillery.com)

**WAGYU BEEF**  
From a farm in Montgomeryshire, Welsh wagyu is aged for over 260 days to intensify its unique taste and marble-rich texture. [iforswelshwagyu.co.uk](http://iforswelshwagyu.co.uk)



### Must try

**ELDER:** We preserve this delicate plant to use all year round either for pickling, as elder ketchup or for elderberry capers. In autumn we serve it with grouse, with 100% chocolate grated over the top.



KANDY, SRI LANKA



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# CYCLE ROUTE *Charente*

**From oyster farms to sweeping beaches, take in this stretch of French coast on two wheels**  
**Words: Charlotte Wigram-Evans**



## 1 LA ROCHELLE

Start off in La Ville Blanche ('the White City'), so-called for its dazzling limestone buildings. La Rochelle has a rich seafaring history that can be seen in its array of lighthouses and salt-resistant slate roofs. It's from here that Montreal's founders set sail in the 17th century.

## 2 CHÂTELLAILLON-PLAGE

This 1.5-mile beach has wonderful views of îles de Ré, d'Oléron, d'Aix and the brooding Fort Boyard, plus acres of white sand. Amble along the promenade, browsing the sweet little cafes and shops — don't forget to pick up an ice cream.

## 3 ROCHEFORT

Like La Rochelle, this city has preserved much of its maritime past. The naval dockyard is particularly impressive; stop by La Corderie Royale, the former rope factory for the Royal French Navy which houses a fascinating museum.

## 4 SAINT-JEAN-D'ANGLE

Park your bike at this storybook restored castle, complete with water-filled moat and keep. Staff reveal its long, bloody history — they even dress up in armour and carry reproduction weapons, making this a perfect pit-stop for little visitors.



## 5 MARENNE-OLÉRON

Call in at these oyster farms, famous throughout France. A tour around the Cité de l'Huître ('Oyster City') gives you an insight into the life of these feted bivalves — from the ocean to the maturing beds — as well as the chance to try some.

## 6 LE PONT DU DIABLE

Carved by the Atlantic, this huge natural stone arch near Royan is a photographer's dream, particularly impressive at sunset. If you've got time, the beach is perfect for taking five to rest weary thighs.

## 7 ROYAN

Striped beach tents, long stretches of sand, belle époque villas; Royan is postcard-perfect, but check out the concrete Notre-Dame de Royan church that stands in stark contrast to its picturesque surroundings.



*Where to stay*

# CHIANG MAI

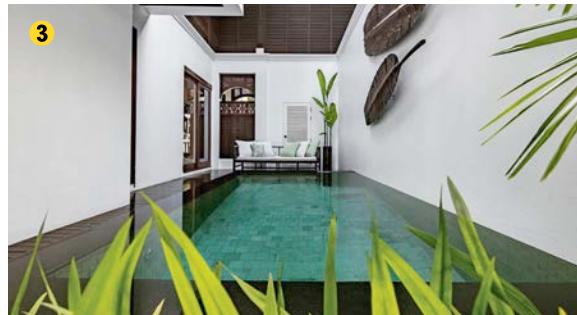
Once a backpacker's jumping off point, the Thai city's new rooms make it well worth revisiting

1 X2 CHIANG MAI RIVERSIDE RESORT

Opened on the banks of the Ping River last November, the X2's slick design features wooden stools alongside exposed brick walls, and traditional white stucco motifs on the bedroom walls. If you can tear yourself away, don't miss the pool, with its in-water loungers. Doubles from £140, B&B. [x2resorts.com](http://x2resorts.com)

2 VANA SOM

In an area where most of the luxury options are dominated by big chains, Vana Som stands out from the crowd. Owner Aarya Surindhara has transformed her grandmother's Siamese-Lanna manor into six self-contained rooms across a main villa, as well as two external pavilions. The style is simple — lots of carved wood and tiled floors — and guests enjoy butler service, so there's time to relax or nip over to the pool and gym at the nearby Four Seasons (access is free to guests). There's also a botanical garden and the in-house restaurant, Terra, opens this month. Doubles from £159, B&B. [vanasom.com](http://vanasom.com)



2



4

3 137 PILLARS HOUSE

Super-swish bolthole 137 Pillars House whirls you back to its 1880 roots with teak furniture in the bedrooms and rocking chairs on the terraces. The public areas are especially atmospheric; this was originally part of the Borneo Company HQ, and there's still a sumptuous feel to the wood-panelled bar, daybed-strewn lounge and white lobby. Doubles from £239, B&B. [137pillarschiangmai.com](http://137pillarschiangmai.com)

4 AKYRA MANOR

This ever-trendy hotel fits right in with its surroundings on Nimmanhaemin Road, Chiang Mai's digital nomad hub. All 30 suites are modern, if slightly subdued affairs (hardwood furnishings dominate), but you're here for the public areas, which are deliciously popular with locals — especially the rooftop pool and bar, Rise. Doubles from £155, B&B. [theakyra.com](http://theakyra.com) JULIA BUCKLEY



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## HALLOWEEN HORRORS

# Bump in the night



**This October half-term, discover a haunted castle, carve your own pumpkin or set out on a lamp-lit woodland walk**

### Creepy castles

Wander the grounds of the haunted Carisbrooke Castle, on the Isle of Wight, with ghost hunters and listen to macabre tales of times gone by. Don't forget your Halloween costume — the most spine-tingling wins a prize. Back on the mainland, Dover and Portchester Castles are also offering equally frightening days out for the family. 20 – 28 October

### Fangtastic horror

The windswept, haunting remains of Whitby Abbey, inspiration for Bram Stoker's gothic tale, *Dracula*, are the backdrop for a week of spooky activities. 27 October – 4 November



 [english-heritage.org.uk](http://english-heritage.org.uk)  
 [nationaltrust.org.uk](http://nationaltrust.org.uk)



### THE LEGEND OF THE JACK-O'-LANTERN

There are lots of creepy, colourful stories about how these pumpkin lanterns got their name, but it's most likely from the early 17th century, and the night watchmen who'd carry lamps with them on duty.

### SMASHING PUMPKINS

Head to Castle Ward in County Down and join in the Autumn Pumpkinfest, where more than 2,000 pumpkins are ready to be carved. Solve the Pumpkin People's clues on the trail and browse local crafts and artisan food in the Stableyard (10–21 October). Or follow the shrunken apple trail through the garden, listen to spooky stories, or press freshly harvest apples into juice at Godolphin in Cornwall. 20 – 28 October



### ROTTEN ROMANS

Join a Roman soldier and hear a gruesome tale or two of rotten Roman life at Chester's Roman Fort. Try out for the Roman army, get up to speed in the drill session and even get your hands on some Roman weapons and artefacts. 27 October – 4 November

### LIGHT IT UP

Visit the wild heathland views and mysterious rock houses of Kinver Edge in Staffordshire to make and decorate your own willow and paper lantern. Return on Halloween itself to join in the eerie evening procession of lights and pumpkins through the woods and up to the hillfort. 29 – 30 October

MARIA PIERI



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## GENOA *Like a local*

Meals can roll on for hours in much of Italy, but the Genoese love a quick fix. Do as the locals do and grab a crispy slice of focaccia and finish it off with the best pralines in town

### Grab and go

Genoa's street food tradition comes from its history as a port, and the best place for a flavour of the past is **CAREGA**, a hole-in-the-wall *friggitoria* (frying shop) by the Porto Antico. Time has stood still here, with its white-tiled interior and couple of stools to perch on. Depending on the catch, you'll find anything from calamari and octopus to various types of fish, but go for the *fritto misto*, where it's all piled together.

*Via Sottoripa 113/R.*

But focaccia's probably the snack that's made it furthest outside Genoa. Every bakery in town serves it but try the one from **PRIANO** in the west of the city. A family business that opened in 1964, it's been renowned for its extra-light, crispy slices of focaccia since the day it opened. *prianopasticceria.it*

For something a little different, try *farinata* — a kind of pancake made from chickpeas. It's as important to the Genoese as focaccia, and **LA FARINATA DEI TEATRI** is the place to try it. In the 'new town', but open since 1861, this small bakery cooks them in giant pans, slicing them up into generous portions to eat inside or take away. *Piazza Marsala 5/R.*

If you thought pizza was as good as it gets, then you haven't had *pinsa*; its rough-and-ready predecessor, and a dish that dates back to ancient Rome. **PINSACCIO** serves up rustic versions at startlingly good prices — including three vegan varieties.

*facebook.com/pinsaccio*

For an overview of the city's street food tradition, try **LA SCIAMADDA** — halfway between a restaurant and a takeaway. You'll find a range of specials from Genoese 'cucina povera' ('poor cuisine') from *panissa* to a range of tasty flans using seasonal vegetables including pumpkin, broccoli or onion.

*facebook.com/lasciamadda*

### Sweet spots

The **CAVO** family have been trading from their historic *bottega* since 1250. They've been making amaretti biscuits since the 19th century, but don't miss their Genoese *pandolce* — a traditional, brioche-y, fruit-studded cake originally made by sailors' wives. *cavo.it*

Chocolate has a prevalent history in Genoa, and **VIGANOTTI** has been going strong since 1866 in its teeny workshop near Piazza delle Erbe. Its classic pralines are sublime,

as are the more modern innovations such as salted chocolate and a tea-infused range. *romeoviganotti.it*

Meanwhile **ZUCOTTI**, another chocolatier, is a little younger at just 80 years old. A family business, they've been working from the same recipes since the beginning, making everything by hand. Try the *gianduia* chocolates or the *gelatine* — fruit-flavoured jellies dusted in sugar. *zuccotticioccolato.it*

Part of the joy of these historical *botteghe* is in the buildings themselves — and **ROMANENGO** is a prime example. The confectioner has two premises in Genoa — go for the old one in the medieval centre where you'll find sweets, candied fruits and chestnuts laid out in a wood-panelled, marble-floored shop. *romanengo.com*

And if your teeth can still take it, **VILLA** is another outstanding confectionery shop, with sugared almonds and chocolate 'olives' among its bestsellers. Come for its seasonal recipes, using fresh fruit in summer (such as peaches in amaretto and glazed strawberries) and marzipan at Christmas. *villa1827.it* **JULIA BUCKLEY**

**CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:** Restaurant terrace in Genoa; farinata (a kind of pancake made from chickpeas); focaccia bread with herbs; assorted chocolates at Viganotti; the old fishing village of Boccadasse; torta mazzini from Cavo cafe

**TOP TIP**

Although tempting, don't make big plans for dinner — aperitivo hour is big here, and an early-evening drink will come accompanied with copious snacks to fill you up.



IMAGES: 4CORNERS; ALAMY; GETTY; SUPERSTOCK

## MATTEO LOSIO'S TOP 5 foodie favourites

**1. DOUCE**

The young pastry chef who owns this new shop is continuously improving his products — from perfectly-shaped cakes to chocolate creations. I love the shop's French flavour, and the incredible amount of attention to detail in its products. [douce.it](http://douce.it)

**2. PANIFICIO GRISSINERIA CLARETTA**

This is my favourite place for some of the best focaccia in Genoa. It's set in a typical traditional shop, family-owned and run like a traditional bottega. Don't miss the dove-shaped cake over Easter. *Via della Posta Vecchia, 12A*

**3. TRIPPERIA LA CASANA**

Tripe is a true Genoese tradition, and here they serve it prepared to strict tradition. It's all wood-fired, and the tripe is put in gigantic copper pots and cooked very delicately — all in front of you. *Vico della Casana, 3R*

**4. PANIFICIO MACRÌ**

Don't miss this superb spot for focaccia in the fishing neighbourhood of Boccadasse. The dough is left to prove for many hours, and they also make artisanal products such as pandolce. *Via Cavallotti Felice, 26/R*

**5. TAGLIAFICO**

One of Genoa's most famous pastry shops, its *chiffieri* (traditional Genoese croissants) are superb. The place is family-run and the long-serving waiting staff putting together elegant little boxes of pastries are almost part of the furniture. [pasticceriatagliafico.it](http://pasticceriatagliafico.it)

Matteo Losio is co-owner of Trattoria Bruxaboschi in San Desiderio, in the hills outside Genoa. [bruxaboschi.com](http://bruxaboschi.com)

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# STAY AT HOME Isles of Scilly

Discover this archipelago with its fine food, balmy climate and picture-perfect beaches

IMAGES: VISIT ISLES OF SCILLY/ADJ BROWN

## Why go

Deserted bays, wild heathland, waves crashing against towering limestone cliffs — welcome to the Isles of Scilly, an archipelago of almost 150 islands, 28 miles off the Cornish coast. But don't let its proximity to the UK fool you; these islands feel like a different world. Just like the islands themselves, the glorious sunshine and balmy heat are positively Mediterranean, and the flight on a tiny 16-seater plane that bumps along at just 7,000ft feels like a step back in time. And it doesn't change after touchdown: cars are a rare sight; supermarkets are non-existent; and these rugged, unspoilt islands ease on at a gentle, unhurried pace. [islesofscilly-travel.co.uk](http://islesofscilly-travel.co.uk)

## DON'T MISS

Even in the height of summer, there are enough secluded coves for everyone. On the islands of Bryher, Tresco and St Martin's especially, wander just a little off the path and find a deserted stretch of white sand with views of battle-scarred rock formations against the Atlantic Ocean. While the water's chilly, a dip is a must.

## WE LIKE

Head to Tresco Abbey Gardens, a 17-acre maze of cobble walkways winding through tropical plant life, from palm trees and juicy succulents to cacti of all shapes and sizes. It's a riot of colour and smells — and hats off to the gardeners who keep it looking so spectacular all year long. [tresco.co.uk/enjoying/abbey-garden](http://tresco.co.uk/enjoying/abbey-garden)



## What to do

There's no better way to explore the smallest islands — empty save for seabirds and seals — than by kayak. Set off from Higher Town Bay on St Martin's and paddle out to any one of the teeny islets dotted off the shoreline. Drag your kayak up a sandy shore and revel in just how far away civilisation feels. [scillysealsnorkelling.com](http://scillysealsnorkelling.com)

CHARLOTTE WIGRAM-EVANS



## WHERE TO STAY

Hell Bay Hotel on Bryher is a relaxed affair, with its blue-and-white cottages looking out to sea, and ever-helpful staff on hand for advice on what to see and do on the island. Don't miss the lobster in garlic butter sauce at dinner before walking it off in time for sunset from the hill beside the hotel. [hellbay.co.uk](http://hellbay.co.uk)



## WHERE TO EAT

Fraggle Rock Bar on Bryher makes good use of the archipelago's seafood. Prawns, lobster, crab all feature, and for those after the ultimate seaside classic, the fish and chips are delicious.

[bryher.co.uk](http://bryher.co.uk)

# MAKE LIFE FUN

One day we had a dream of Malhadinha...



Herdade da  
Malhadinha Nova

Alentejo, Portugal

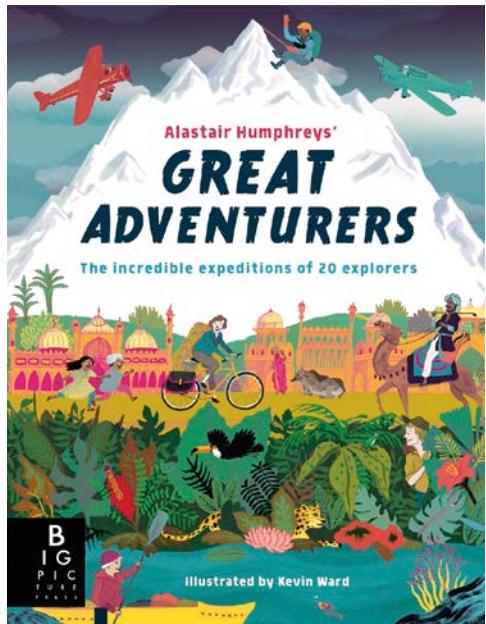
WWW.MALHADINHANOVA.PT



# The Word

## DIFFICULT ADVENTURES, SIMPLY TOLD

**A book for the child explorer in all of us, Alastair Humphreys' *Great Adventures* brings inspiring tales to your coffee table**



One of National Geographic's Adventurers of the Year, Alastair Humphreys has taken time out from his roving adventures to select some of the incredible journeys undertaken by 20 of the world's greatest explorers. With inspiring tales from adventurers including Dervla Murphy and Laurie Lee, *Great Adventures: The Incredible Expeditions of 20 Explorers*, is the sort of book you buy for your kids and keep for yourself.

Illustrated by Kevin Ward, this pictorial showcase of derring-do is aimed at kids aged seven and over but its cartoon strips, maps and charts are so charming and uncomplicated that it could happily bring a splash of colour to most coffee tables. Leaf through the world's 'worst journey' (Scott's Antarctic expedition), admire maps charting the flights of pioneering female aviators Amelia Earhart and Beryl Markham, and swot up on the inspiring world tour undertaken by wheelchair athlete Rick Hansen.

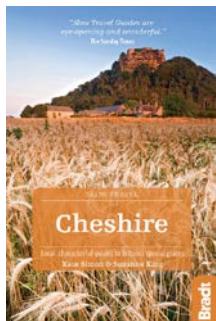
*Great Adventures: The Incredible Expeditions of 20 Explorers* by Alastair Humphreys is published by Big Picture Press, RRP: £16.99 **SARAH BARRELL**



ILLUSTRATIONS: KEVIN WARD

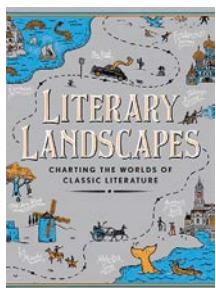


### GET THE GUIDES



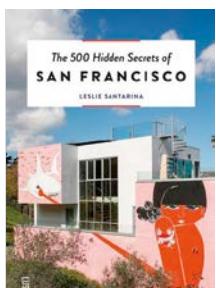
#### SLOW TRAVEL: CHESHIRE

This first-ever pan-county guide champions Cheshire beyond its picture-postcard black-and-white timbered buildings. RRP: £12.99 (Brad: Slow Travel)



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**Win**

# A LUXURY THREE-NIGHT BREAK TO MARRAKECH

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#### The destination

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NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC TRAVELLER FOOD PRESENTS *Macao*

If you're after some inspiration for your next foodie adventure, then look no further — we're hosting our first culinary evening this October

For this edition of Travel Geeks: Rush Hour — a collaboration between *National Geographic Traveller Food* and the Macao Government Tourism Office, taking place at Carousel, London — we're doing things a little differently. Our expert panel will be in attendance as usual, ready to be quizzed on all things Macao, but we'll also be immersing you in the region's rich culinary scene with a collection of small plates (and wine!). Just an hour's ferry from Hong Kong, Macao enjoys a fusion of European and Asian flavours, a result of its Portuguese-Chinese heritage. Come and discover what makes Macao such a hotspot for discerning foodies, and leave with plenty of inspiration for a Macanese escapade.

### THE PANEL



**JONATHAN PHANG**  
TV chef and  
cookbook author



**SUE WHITEHEAD**  
Macao Government Tourism  
Office UK representative



**JO FLETCHER-CROSS**  
Contributing editor,  
*National Geographic Traveller Food*



**MODERATED BY**  
**FARIDA ZEYNALOVA**  
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Tuesday 6 November 2018

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Covent Garden, 2 Dryden Street,  
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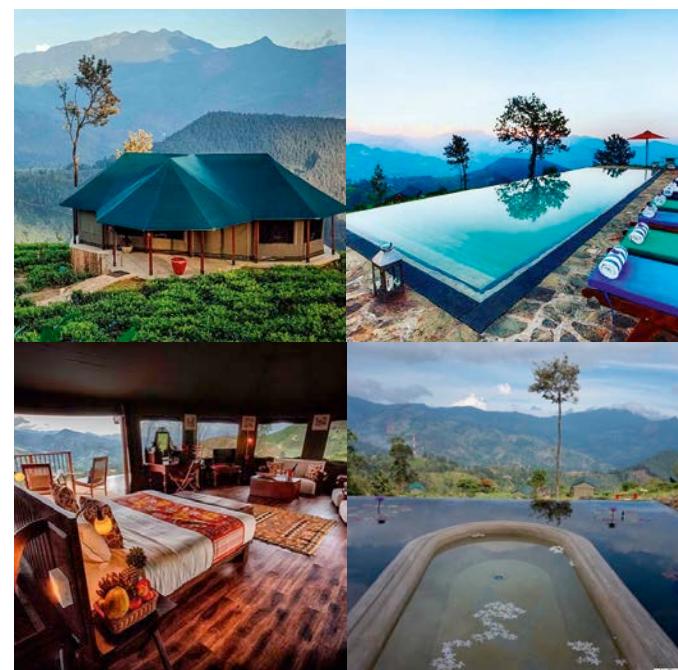
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NOTES FROM AN AUTHOR // SARAH FRANKLIN

# FOREST OF DEAN

**The forest's rural beauty has inspired storytellers for generations, but past the gnarled branches is a more poignant side to this English woodland**

After seven years of living overseas, perhaps I shouldn't have been surprised that when I started to write a novel, it was about my roots — almost literally. The Forest of Dean is a bit like the drummer in the band; hidden behind its louder, better-known mates — like nearby Cheltenham, the Cotswolds, the Welsh Valleys — and favoured by a select, contrary few. It's 42sq miles of ancient mixed woodland and one of the most beautiful landscapes in the country, containing limestone cliffs, sweeping river views, and magical forest paths that twist and turn through moss-covered trees. As Dennis Potter, the Forest's most famous son, put it: "It's a strange and beautiful place, with a people who were as warm as anywhere else, but they seemed warmer to me." Storytellers have long seen the possibilities of this secret landscape; as well as Potter's works, it's credited with being the inspiration for Middle Earth in JRR Tolkien's books, and has featured in everything from *Doctor Who* to *Star Wars*, as well the *Harry Potter* books.

I wanted to take my seven years of latent homesickness and bring them home, to write a novel about what it's like to live somewhere where your world view is shuttered by the trees that surround you, while your cosmic insignificance is writ large by these same trees. But I wasn't brave enough (yet) to write about the now, so I moved my emotions back 70 years, to the Second World War. And though I no longer live there, I took myself back to the Forest of Dean, to imagine what it would've been like to be so far from conflict but in so many ways, central to it.

The war saw the Forest communities expand as new people joined the 'old growth' — families who'd lived here for generation upon generation. Evacuees were billeted in local homes, often in stark isolation and amid the eerie calls and crackles of the woods. Camps were built for American GIs who were said to have stored the ammunition used for D-Day in disused mine shafts. There were also more enticing rumours claiming that upon departure, the same GIs had stored Harley Davidsons in the same mine shafts, planning to come back for them one day. Many a teenage boy in the



subsequent years found a map of the old mines and made plans to go Harley-hunting. Land girls and the 'lumberjills' (members of the newly formed Women's Timber Corps) were also trained here before setting out into the woods to cut down trees for post-Blitz rebuilding.

Perhaps most compelling, and unthinkable in today's world, was the POW camp, Camp 61 in Wynch's Hill, near Coleford. It's been removed now, but was one of more than 500 set up around the country to house both Italian and, later, German POWs. In the Forest, the Italians worked alongside the lumberjills, charming them with their renditions of opera as they trimmed hedges in the autumn.

The great joy of a forest is that, despite the changes wrought upon it by war or age, it's easy to imagine how it would've been to be a foreigner. To have been captured in the African desert and shipped here via rickety truck, only to end up in a land of endless evergreen, amidst a warm, shy population whose dialect was so strong there was almost no point in trying to do anything but nod and smile. To set foot inside the forest is to easily step back 70 years. Leaves like jewels drift down in greeting, floating to the floor or brushing past your face by way of hello. It's hard not to feel like a 1940s bride, ducking through the lychgate to a veil-full of confetti as the colours flutter and twirl all around you. The seasons' changes mark the passing of time, as they would've done for POWs denied any real news or a timepiece: bluebell woods, babbling brooks, tiny little ponds for summer bathes accessed by twisting, made-up lanes and oaks whose dry, amber leaves mark the start of winter.

The Forest has been here since Saxon times and will continue to thrive far beyond my lifetime. And in the meantime, I'll tell the stories I find among its gnarled branches, and tread carefully amidst the weight of history and the unknowable possibilities of the future.

*The seasons' changes mark the passing of time, as they would've done for POWs denied any real news or a timepiece: bluebell woods, babbling brooks and oaks whose dry, amber leaves mark the start of winter*

VIEW FROM THE USA // AARON MILLAR

# BEYOND WORDS

**The American Writers Museum doesn't just celebrate the nation's literary titans, it reveals how stories help to define us and our place in the world**

**T**he author C S Lewis once said: "Literature adds to reality, it does not simply describe it." It's an intriguing idea. What if, rather than being just the mirror — a reflection of the world around us — stories were also the frame? I know what you're going to say: I've hidden in my wardrobe a thousand times too, Lewis, and never seen so much as a kitty, let alone a lion or a witch. I always used to think that mere words can't possibly create reality. But I changed my mind in Chicago.

The American Writers Museum, which opened here last year, is the first of its kind — a museum dedicated solely to the country's literary greats. There's video game poetry, halls filled with extracts from masterpieces and others with messy first drafts, corrections scribbled in. You can add a line to a story created every day by visitors, peer into the mind of a writer to see how the story-crafting process unfolds; there's even a 'word waterfall', which immerses you in a wraparound screen of tumbling prose. But what really caught my eye was a hallway called A Nation of Writers, which traces the evolution of American writing, from the diaries of the first pioneers to the pens of contemporary greats.

Something remarkable happens as I walk through it. First, there's the 17th-century writings of English explorer John Smith (of Pocahontas fame), which framed perceptions of the New World as a wild, bountiful place; then William Bradford's description of the first Thanksgiving; Benjamin Franklin's account of arriving penniless in Philadelphia; the first pamphlets arguing for the American colonies to break with the British Crown; the Declaration of Independence; and then the Constitution — perhaps the greatest piece of writing in the country's history, to this day defining how Americans understand themselves as individuals and a nation.

I travel from the Antebellum South of Mark Twain — the first truly American voice, whose fiery vernacular defined the identity of the new country — through the poets of the Civil War, the authors of industrialisation and the prophets of the American Dream. There's Tennessee Williams, one of the first

to articulate that most fervent national creed: that those who work hard enough can achieve whatever they want; F Scott Fitzgerald, who showed the vanity behind it; Steinbeck, who raged against its economic injustice; and Arthur Miller, Hunter S Thompson and Kurt Vonnegut, who smashed it apart.

What emerges is not just the history of the country, but the shape of it too — like a tapestry, each piece of prose a single weave of thread, coming together to create an image of America itself. Stories steer our feelings. When I look across the vast primal barrenness of the far north, I hear Jack London's *Call of the Wild*, those 'yearnings and stirrings for he knew not what'. As I drive the windswept beaches of the Pacific Coast, I feel the freedom of Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*: 'a wild yearning overburst of American joy'. When I hike the dark woods of Maine, I find the inspiration Thoreau sought while living in a cabin on the banks of a New England pond (chronicled in his seminal book, *Walden*). Words don't just reflect reality, they're its seeds. Our world springs from the tales we tell of it.

Science speaks of stories as a miracle of human consciousness, as unique and important to our evolution as opposable thumbs. We understand ourselves through narrative — through the story of our lives. Personalities are constructed from it, history is told through it, morality is taught by it. Stories are universal in every culture in every country of the world.

As I reach the end of the hall, I think: what of our stories today? In his 1922 poem, *The Waste Land*, T S Eliot — despairing at the ravages of modern life — wrote: 'What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow, Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man ... I will show you fear in a handful of dust.'

A country is defined by its narrative — a story that we type, tweet, post and pen every day. We can create the world we want, we just have to imagine it. And then put pen to paper. [choosechicago.com](http://choosechicago.com) [americanwritersmuseum.org](http://americanwritersmuseum.org)

British travel writer Aaron Millar ran away from London in 2013 and has been hiding out in the Rocky Mountains of Boulder, Colorado ever since.

 @AaronMWriter

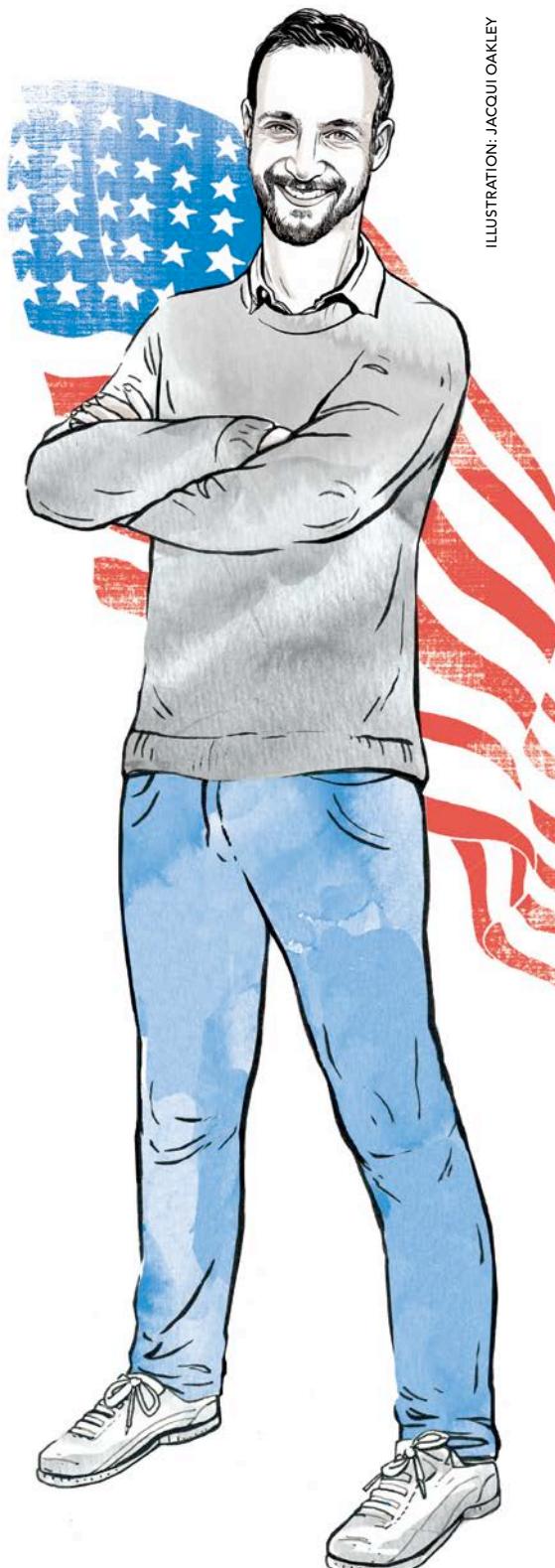
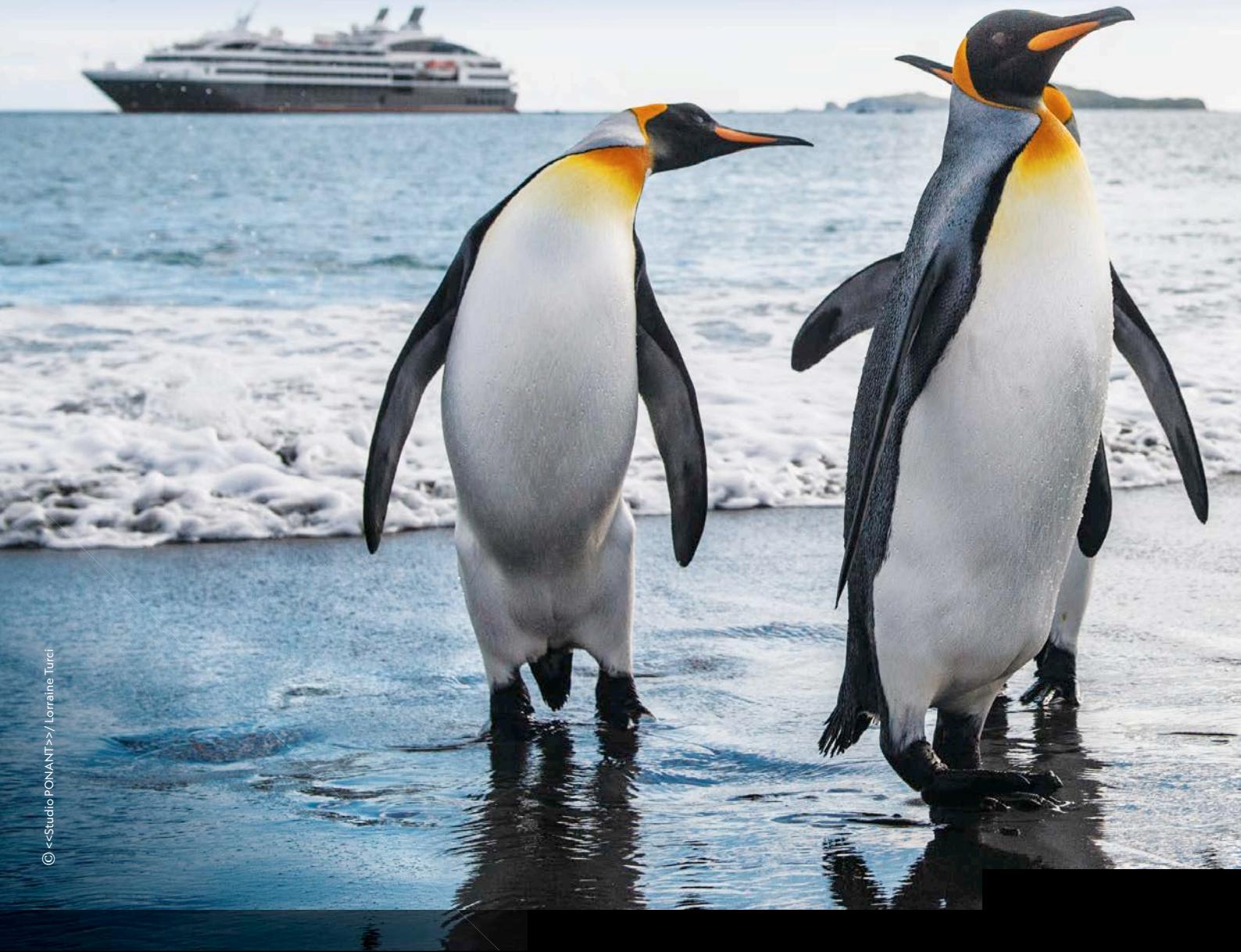


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# The Blog



**“We have time on our hands in Lubbock,” one twentysomething customer tells me, wiping smears of sauce from his mouth. “So we drink. And when we drink, we eat.”**

TEXAS

## BARBECUE, BEER & BUDDY HOLLY

**Most visitors come to Lubbock to pay homage to its most famous son, but the city itself is as much of a star**



**I**t's 6pm on a Saturday evening in Lubbock, Texas. I stroll along the wide, empty streets, dotted with family-owned car dealerships, well-worn houses and the occasional convenience store. A light breeze throws dust into the air, a teenager sitting on a doorstep twangs the strings of a battered guitar, and a tumbleweed — yes, an actual tumbleweed, the greatest Texan cliche — drifts lazily across the tarmac.

Chances are you've never heard of this small city, which sits in the flat, custard-coloured plains of northwest Texas. While travellers flood to Dallas for its shiny skyscrapers and shopping, and Austin for its rock bars and vegan food trucks, Lubbock remains an unlikely destination for those taking a big Texan tour. And yet I'm here.

Me, and a handful of others, with one thing — or rather, person — in common: Buddy Holly. Because it's here in this unassuming city that one of rock's greatest icons was born and where his fledgling music career took

shape. It was in these very car dealership showrooms where he played his first gigs; he later supported Elvis when the hip-thrusting superstar played the city's clubs, and it was here he proposed to Maria Elena Santiago on their first date. Two months later, the pair married in Lubbock.

Sadly, in February 1959, just six months after the wedding, 22-year-old Holly boarded a plane that crashed soon after take off. Today, his famous black, horn-rimmed glasses (plucked from the wreckage), Fender guitar, yearbooks, records and pipes are just some of the personal items on display at the Buddy Holly Center, a former train depot that's now a site of pilgrimage for fans around the world.

A love of Buddy Holly may be what draws most visitors to Lubbock, but after an hour or two, it's likely most will have fallen for the charms of the city too; its bars, its restaurants and its residents — many of whom grin happily when they learn that this Londoner has made the five-hour drive along Interstate

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20 chiefly to guzzle beer, hear live music and scoff burgers in their small city. Some people will tell you that the state's best brisket is at the end of a four-hour queue in Austin, but here in Lubbock I devour a barbecue feast so good I still long for it today. Sticky, saucy pork ribs, tangy pickles and sweet but cheesy cornbread are piled onto silver trays at Evie Mae's BBQ, a packed joint at the side of a freeway junction. "We have time on our hands in Lubbock," one twentysomething customer tells me, wiping smears of sauce from his mouth. "So we drink. And when we drink, we eat."

I'm happily on board. My next meal is at Triple J's Chop House & Brew Pub, a craft brewery and live music bar that occupies a prime spot on Buddy Holly Avenue. Portions of fried chicken come heaped with gravy, and the teenage waiter is excited to have a celeb in town. No, not Bernie Sanders, who's dining in a booth nearby, but me — the Brit who's swerved the other big sites of Texas in favour of low-key Lubbock.

It's the same story at The Crafthouse Gastropub, where a waitress serves me one of the best burgers of my life: an inch-thick patty with a slick of ketchup and a jumble of pickles atop a duvet of cheese.

That night, in The Blue Light Live, a dingy bar with sticky floors, cheap beer and punters drunkenly two-stepping to rock, I watch a young and hopeful rock band from Dallas deliver their 'hits'. I could've seen them play to a glam crowd in their hometown, or beneath a crane-littered skyline in Austin, but it feels right in Lubbock. Sure, it may not be the prettiest city in the States, but for a taste of true Texas, I couldn't have done better.

HANNAH SUMMERS

[visitlubbock.org](http://visitlubbock.org)

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Weekender

# LEEUWARDEN

*Capital of the fiercely proud province of Friesland, the Dutch city is embracing its moment as one of this year's European Capitals of Culture, with exhibitions, sculptures and cultural centres. WORDS: Jo Fletcher-Cross*



Friesland isn't like the rest of the Netherlands. The North Sea has shaped this province's landscape and history, and the area still retains a strong identity — fiercely independent, friendly, free-thinking and welcoming. As far back as 1300, the Frisians created a free state, away from centralised authority with their own language, laws, and traditions. Though they've been part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands for a long time now, the culture and language remains.

And Leeuwarden's unique culture is finally being recognised as one of two European Capitals of Culture this year. This is the first time ever the title has been given to not just a city, but a surrounding area too, and all 11 cities (some of which are actually little more than villages) in the region are taking part. Each of the arty cities is linked by canal, and there was once a famous ice-skating race

between them; climate change means the canal hasn't frozen enough to hold the race since 1997. For the Capital of Culture, world-renowned artists have been commissioned to build a fountain in each town, to provide another, perhaps more permanent, link.

But the city is more than that, too — it's fiercely proud of its famous offspring: exotic dancer and double agent Mata Hari, and mind-bending artist MC Escher. Leeuwarden may be small, but it punches above its weight culturally, historically and aesthetically.

Just a few hours from Amsterdam by train, it's typically Dutch in many ways: dissected by those famous canals, it's dotted with pretty gabled houses and charming cobbled streets. There's a tower that leans more than Pisa's, a prison that's now a cultural centre, and the winding Kleine Kerkstraat, filled with boutique stores set in beautiful 17th-century

golden age buildings. It's also the historic home of the Nassau family, ancestors of the current Dutch king — a mural near the central square depicts a family tree where it's possible to trace all the current kings and queens of Europe back to the 18th century reign of Maria Louise, Princess Consort of Orange.

Leeuwarden bears all this lightly, with a good dose of modesty. After buying an ice cream at PUUR Ijs & Chocolate on Kline Kerkstraat, a young woman asks if I'm on holiday. "It's nice to see people visiting from abroad," she tells me. "We've always had so many connections to the world, but we haven't been an exciting place. Now we have art, cool places, good food. I always thought I'd move away but now I think I'll stay." It's not the kind of chat you have with people in a big city. But then, this isn't a big city. It's a Frisian city. And Friesland isn't like the rest of the Netherlands.



## State of the art

During the Capital of Culture year, the Fries Museum has mounted temporary blockbuster exhibitions about Leeuwarden's most famous residents: Mata Hari and M.C. Escher (the Escher's Journey exhibition is on until 28 October). However, there's a permanent exhibition that explores Friesland's 11 cities and the region's quest to find its position in the world. [friesmuseum.nl](http://friesmuseum.nl)



### THREE TO TRY

## Historic buildings

### IN DE WAAG

Built in 1595 in steep-roofed Renaissance style, this was where merchants once brought their goods to be weighed by an official before they were traded in the city's markets. Now it's a cool cafe, with plenty of outdoor seating. [indewaag.nl/en](http://indewaag.nl/en)

### PRINCESSEHOF

The Princessehof National Museum of Ceramics is a must-visit for anyone interested in pottery; it's housed in the elegant 18th-century city palace of Maria Louise van Hessen-Kassel, Princess of Orange-Nassau. [princessehof.nl/en](http://princessehof.nl/en)

### THE LEANING TOWER

Like Pisa's tower, Leeuwarden's Oldehove has a definite lean. Construction began in 1529 on what was to be a 390ft tower, but it started sinking into the soft clay almost immediately. At 128ft high, it still offers great views. [oldehove.eu](http://oldehove.eu)

### Past the post

Occupying the old main post and telegraph office, the atmospheric, 82-room Post-Plaza Hotel has lots of charming little touches that hint at the building's past. Rooms are modern and stylish with antique details: my TV was inside a beautiful ornate wooden wardrobe. Try the French toast made from Frisian sugar bread in the Grand Café, a beautiful airy space with soaring church-like beams. [post-plaza.nl](http://post-plaza.nl)



### Prison drama

The Blokhuispoort is a former prison that's now a cultural centre — and where the planning for the Capital of Culture took place. As well as a hostel, library and the offices of numerous start-ups, there's a gallery and a whole wing of old cells that have been transformed into little shops where artists sell and exhibit their wares. Book a table at Proefverlof, a buzzy restaurant complete with original prison doors and barred windows overlooking the water. [blokhuispoort.frl](http://blokhuispoort.frl)

### SMOOTH TALKING

Dutch is considered the second language in Friesland, with Frisian being the first. In fact, Frisian has much more in common with Scandinavian languages than it does with Dutch

**EYEWITNESS****DREAM WORLD**

There's a pair of giant heads: a boy and a girl facing each other. They're glowing white, made from a substance that's luminous in a way that appears otherworldly. It turns out to be polyester resin mixed with marble dust. Jaume Plensa's sculpture-cum-fountain is titled 'Love' — it's a towering 23ft structure surrounded by a curtain of mist.

Plensa is one of my favourite artists; his works are huge, figurative and oddly delicate, often transforming public spaces. This one is plonked incongruously outside the main railway station. The more I circumnavigate it, the more it grows on me. "They're dreaming," Plensa is quoted as having said on the website for the 11 Fountains. The fountains are dotted across Dutch cities as part of this year's Capital of Culture programme. "To children, the future is a dream full of promises."

He was inspired, apparently, when he saw mist blanketing the fields of Friesland. "In Friesland the water comes out of the ground," Plensa adds. Right now the water is very much coming out of the sky, and the wind is coming out of the east, whipping the rain into my face. I take shelter in a bar

just across the way. "What do you think of the fountain?" I enquire tentatively of the two women at the table next to mine. The 11 Fountains project has proved controversial — each commission was given to a world-leading sculptor, and some felt local artists should have been involved — so I'm not sure how this conversation will go.

"Hmph," says one woman. "I like it," says the other. "People will come and see it. They'll come for that and they'll probably stay for other things." It's a good point. "Do you think it should have been made by a local artist?" I ask. The first woman nods. "But it's probably more interesting for people that it's this. It's not really for me. I like some of the others more."

I pick a few to visit outside Leeuwarden during the weekend, driving past flat fields, windmills and Friesian horses to tiny, pretty towns and windswept harbours. Everywhere I go, people want to talk to me about the fountains — what I think of them, what they think of them, what I think of Friesland. Children just want to get in them and play. It's a great way to explore the region, but my mind keeps returning to the Plensa and its eerie, beautiful glow. A dream full of promises, he said, and there's so much promise here.



 Fly to Groningen with FlyBe from London Southend, from where it's a 35 minute journey by express train to Leeuwarden. Or take a train (2h10m) from Amsterdam Schipol Airport. [flybe.com](http://flybe.com)

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*Eat*

# FAROE ISLANDS

**A young generation of chefs on this remote North Atlantic archipelago are creating strange and stunning dishes from the bountiful natural larder. Words: Audrey Gillan**



The glory of golden hour enfolds me as I arrive at a little hut on wheels sitting on the edge of Lake Leynar, a half-hour's drive from the Faroese capital, Tórshavn. Such clement weather is never a given up here in these islands where thick fog and rain have currently settled on one side of a mountain, sunshine illuminating the other. I climb the steps into what's essentially a fermentation shed that doubles as a greeting place for guests, where I'm met with a glass of locally brewed beer and a warming bowl of clear lamb broth. This is the first stop on an adventure into the strange and stunning food of the Faroe Islands. Fellow diners warmly salute each other then pile into a Land Rover that skirts around a shingle beach to take us to our destination.

Koks sits in a lush valley surrounded by waterfalls and the sound of oystercatchers. A distractingly named venue to English ears (the word actually means flirt or fusspot in Faroese), this is a new location for the restaurant that was awarded its first Michelin star in February 2017, and it's truly spectacular. We're seated at 'the

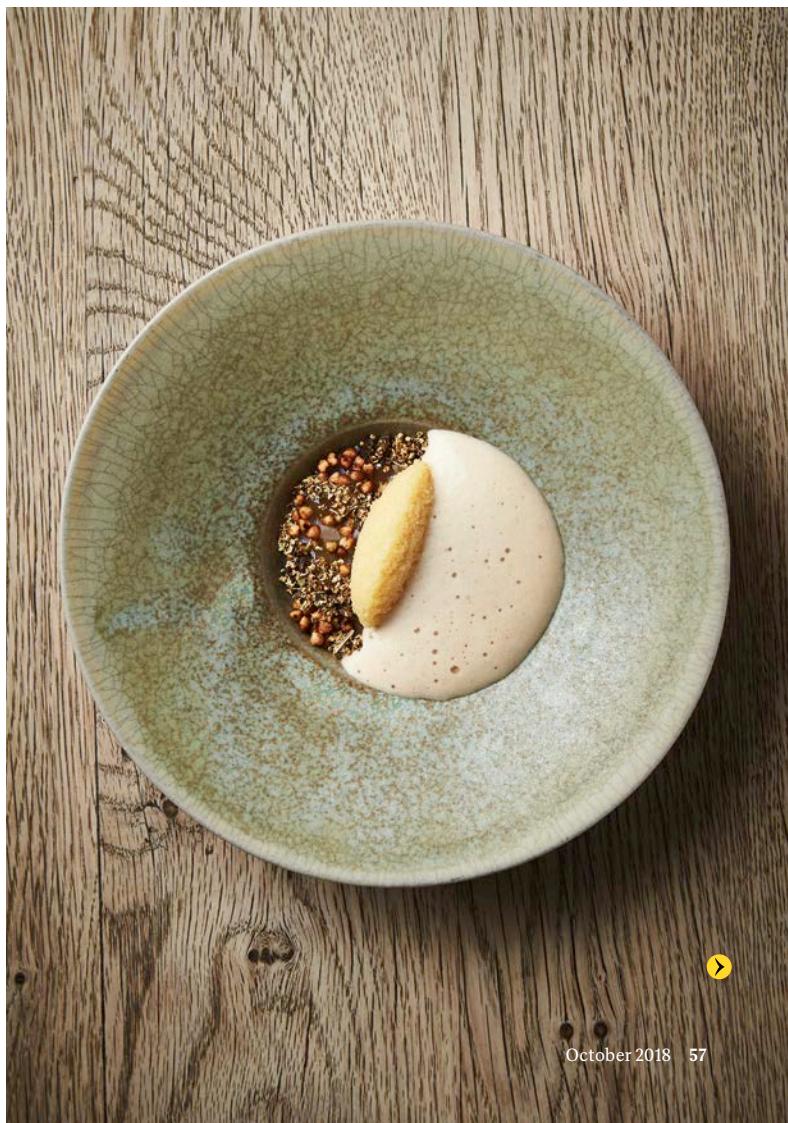
community table', a concept that could bring a person out in the hives, but tonight's gathering of strangers proves to be a hoot. A plate of shellfish, pulled from Kalbak Fjord just two hours before service, is brought to the table. What follows is a multi-course odyssey across land and sea that provides the backbone of the Faroese larder. Queen scallops, capelin roe, halibut, razorbill, foraged herbs and seaweed, crowberries, blueberries, angelica and rhubarb are just some of the ingredients included here.

The next morning, I meet Poul Andrias Ziska, the 28-year-old chef at the helm at Koks. He takes me foraging and explains that he can find different types of cress, beach mustard, fjord cabbage and more but today's pickings are slim — it's a little too early in a very short season.

We drive to Kalbak Fjord, where baskets and boxes are hanging from ropes tied along a pontoon deck — inside are sweet mahogany clams and scallops. "We change dishes according to the seasons but sometimes we might just change one ingredient on one dish. It's a dynamic thing.

**ABOVE:** Traditional black tarred timber and grass roofs, Faroe Islands

**OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:** The old parliament building of Faroe Islands in Tórshavn; Koks restaurant; crab, pickled elderflower, crispy buckwheat and capelin roe with a caramelised onion sauce, Koks; head chef Poul Andrias Ziska, Koks



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ABOVE: Dining at Áarstova

We don't have so many langoustines today, so we have to adapt," says Poul. "We try to source what we have around this area and make it tasty. Where we come from we know what's going on around us with the land and in the sea. The seafood is high quality, the sea doesn't change much, the temperature is good and the water clean."

Set far out in the Atlantic north of Shetland and south of Iceland, the Faroes is an archipelago of 18 small, rocky islands with no native trees. "There are some world maps where you can't even find us," says Sússanna Sørensen of Visit Faroe Islands. The first settlers arrived here more than 1,000 years ago. Hikers and adventurers have long been coming to explore one of Europe's last wild frontiers, but now food-focused tourists have the place on their radar.

In this elemental landscape, where soil is poor and the weather often foul, food was once simply about survival. Now it's about a celebration of limited but hyperlocal cuisine. Poul confides that this is nascent: "The whole restaurant scene in the Faroe Islands is super-young, led by people aged 17 to 30. There's not many older than that, but we will be."

Føroyar is the Faroese name for the archipelago, meaning 'sheep islands', and

there are around 80,000 sheep here with lamb and mutton the main cooking staple. Wind-dried lamb is a particular highlight — it's soft in texture with an umami hit.

Ræst or fermentation is the anchor of Faroese food: fermenting meat and fish in briny sea air was used to preserve it before refrigeration but such is the islanders' taste for ripe protein that almost every family has access to a drying shed, known as a *hjallur*, with slatted walls for ventilation.

Jóannes Patursson is the farmer at Kirkjubøargarður, one of the oldest, still-inhabited wooden houses in the world — it and the surrounding land have been in his family for 17 generations, since 1557. It's located beside the ruins of the medieval St Magnus Cathedral on the island of Streymoy. Inside his *hjallur*, Patursson shows me my first fermenting lamb carcass, hung by its feet and mottled with mould. "We slaughter the lambs, hang them, take their intestines out and make cuts in the carcass to speed up the process," he explains. Ræst is left for four to six weeks but the Faroese also adore *skerpikjøt*, which is left for four to five months to become pungent.

The drying process is also used for haddock and the islands' somewhat controversial whale meat. The annual pilot whale drive,

## A TASTE OF THE Faroe Islands



### KOKS

Small plates of the finest Faroese produce at this Michelin-starred restaurant often include mahogany clam served in its natural state; razorbill breast rolled in a pancake and sliced, served with a sauce of beetroot, rosehip and elderberries; and ræst with pickled lingonberries. For dessert, try ice cream of Arctic thyme. A 20-course tasting menu is around £165 per person without wine. [koks.fo/en](http://koks.fo/en)

### RÆST

Specialising in traditional Faroese fermented food, chef Sonni Zacharesen works with ingredients that some may find challenging but are the very heart of the islands' cooking. There's dried haddock and whale meat with blubber meat; barley risotto made with fermented lamb stock, and pilot whale; and a dessert of fermented gooseberries and rosemary. A set menu with five courses is around £82 per person without wine. [heimaihavn fo](http://heimaihavn fo)

### ÁARSTOVA

Another traditional Faroese restaurant in a lovely old building, the biggest draw here is the lamb and seafood. There's a choice between three and five courses, the latter features smoked haddock, lamb tartare, langoustine bisque, rack of lamb or cod and a dessert of rhubarb compote, ice cream or a selection of cheeses. A set menu of three courses is around £59 per person without wine. [aarstova.fo/aarstova](http://aarstova.fo/aarstova)





## Five Faroe Island food finds

1

### FERMENTED MEATS

The Faroese are the kings of the meat fermentation process, using their omnipresent sheep to produce *ræst* and *skerpikjøt* with lamb that has been hung to dry in the briny North Atlantic air.

2

### BACALAO

Salt cod, often sold to the Spanish and Portuguese market, which becomes soft and sweet when re-soaked in water and rinsed.

3

### TURNIPS

Very few crops grow in the poor soil across the islands but turnips do well and, according to chef Poul Andrias Ziska, they are "crazy good, juicy sweet like an apple and all white. They're in a class of their own."

4

### SEABIRDS

Surrounded by ocean, the Faroes are home to many seabirds, and traditional subsistence living meant that fulmar, puffin, razorbill and gannet are an inherent part of the national diet.

5

### RHUBARB

Rhubarb thrives in the harsh Faroese climate and therefore features in savoury and sweet dishes, jams and liqueurs. The welcome drink at the seafood restaurant Barbara is Rabarbara: Cava mixed with home-made rhubarb syrup.



Faroese sheep, Trshavn

*grindadráp* — where around 900 are culled — has long been the focus of Greenpeace protests. But since whale meat was traditionally a life-or-death source of protein for the Faroese, most locals vociferously defend their tradition. Barren islands meant inhabitants had to make the most of all edible resources, including seabirds. Somewhat fishy-tasting birds such as razorbill, fulmar, and puffin are commonly eaten in the way that other people would eat chicken or duck.

Once a teetotal society with very little in the way of restaurants, the revolution in Faroese gastronomy has seen local families open their doors to guests with supper clubs known as *heimablidni* (meaning home hospitality). I'm welcomed to a chic, modern bungalow in Velbastaður by Anna and Óli Rubeksen, where a dining table looks out across the water to the islands of Hestur and Koltur.

Anna is a nurse working with people with dementia and Óli a social worker in child protection. They're also farmers with 150 'mother' sheep. They began to offer lunches and dinners to visitors as a 'side job'. I sit with them to eat home-made mutton sausage, lamb liver pate and grilled ribbon of lamb — all from their own livestock — as well as a beef stew made from the neighbour's cow.

"Farming is part of life for many Faroese," explains Óli. "People give a hand, going back to their home villages in autumn. You're in the city but have roots back in your

home village. Everyone mucks in. Home slaughtering is a very big part of the lifestyle, too." The couple both cook and the majority of their dishes are from old family recipes.

Dessert is hazelnut and orange meringue. "This is my mother's recipe," says Anna. "We make memory food, connected with people we know. Our crops are potatoes, rhubarb, cabbages — we have a lot of rainfall. People here grow their own, but not much more than their household needs. Lots of people on the Faroe Islands still have a fairly good connection with their food's origin." And it's true. The vast majority of the population of just 49,500 people will know what's in season and where to find angelica — the aromatic plant that's the essence of the islands.

They turn rhubarb into jams and liqueurs, help their neighbours round up sheep or gather sugar kelp and truffle seaweed down on the seashore. With long winters and short days (just three to four hours of daylight at the shortest), islanders must make the best of what they have. And the burgeoning new Faroese food scene is testament to the locals' inventive skills. □

Direct flights from the UK to Faroe Islands depart from Edinburgh with Atlantic Airways, from £180 return. SAS flies from the UK via Scandinavian hubs. Hotel Foroyar has double rooms in low season from £53. [atlantic.fo](http://atlantic.fo) [flysas.com](http://flysas.com) [hotelforoyar.no](http://hotelforoyar.no) [visitfaroeislands.com](http://visitfaroeislands.com)



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# Neighbourhood TEL AVIV

**Bold architecture, a laid-back attitude and sun-kissed beaches — Tel Aviv may sizzle at the edge of the Negev desert, but the Israeli city is Mediterranean cool personified. Words: Connor McGovern. Photographs: Sivan Askayo**



Looking at Tel Aviv's soaring skyline, it's hard to imagine that not too long ago little more than a modest port town occupied this secluded corner of the Med. Over the course of a century, Tel Aviv grew outwards and upwards: a 'New York of the Middle East', or so its founders envisaged. Parallels between the Big Orange and the Big Apple are probably less obvious than its creators had hoped; visitors looking to tick off landmarks might leave disappointed. But that's because Tel Aviv's charms lie elsewhere — its quarters bubble with creative spirit; full of art studios, bold architecture, and locals who know how to have a good time. Just make sure you leave time for a night on the tiles.

**Old Jaffa**

"You know, Jaffa feels like you're in a completely different city sometimes," says friend-of-a-friend Anat. We're having a coffee outside a colourful little cafe called Puaa. "And I guess that's because it is a different city."

Strictly speaking, she's right. Tel Aviv-Yafo (as the entire city is rightly called) nods to two cities: Tel Aviv and Yafo, or 'Jaffa'. A ripe fruit at over 3,000 years old, it's here Tel Aviv owes its humble beginnings: when Jaffa's old sandstone walls became too crowded, plans were made to develop a new garden suburb to the north. While most of those who settled in Jaffa were Arabs — who still make up the majority of the local population — there's a lingering multiculturalism as I wander through the shady steps and alleyways of the Old Town. At St Peter's Church, mass is held in four languages, and sitting cheek-by-jowl in the town are Greek Orthodox and Armenian monasteries, a former Libyan synagogue, and a mosque originally built for Muslim sailors who would come to pray before heading out to sea.

Old Jaffa's golden era as a port (known even to the Ancient Egyptians) is long gone but the area is seeing a new wave of settlers. "It's an inspiring place for me to work," says multimedia artist Samuel Vengrinovitch.

Originally from San Francisco, he's one of several creatives swapping Tel Aviv for the Old Town's evocative sandstone streets.

"Its ancient history and laid-back Mediterranean vibe create a unique environment. Jaffa has so many unique, old apartments and studios — these interesting workspaces just don't exist in other parts of the city."

Aside from the buildings, I ask him what else he likes most about being here. "I can easily walk down to the sea to watch the sunset. It's so calming and beautiful; I must have seen thousands of them."

Before dusk, I pay my respects to Jaffa's fabled flea market — a thriving maze of curios, where each stall is a mini Aladdin's cave. "Come, there's a genie inside!" cries one seller, trying to lure me in with a gleaming bronze oil lamp. It's tempting, but I resist.

Instead, I come to the top of HaPisgah Gardens, where parakeets flit from palm to palm, to admire Tel Aviv's sweeping promenade. Hotels and high-rises glint in the evening light, and beaches are dotted with the last sunbathers of the day. I can see why Samuel loves these burning sunsets so much: old and new sit side-by-side, and from its quiet stone walls, Old Jaffa fondly looks on at its flashy, modern grandson.

*I pay my respects to Jaffa's fabled flea market — a thriving maze of curios, where each stall is a mini Aladdin's cave. 'Come, there's a genie inside!' cries one seller, trying to lure me in with a gleaming bronze oil lamp*

**BELOW FROM LEFT:** Tel Aviv beach; Allenby Street, Kerem HaTeimanim  
**RIGHT:** Old-fashioned herb store at Carmel Market, Kerem HaTeimanim





## When in Tel Aviv

1

### ROTHSCHILD BOULEVARD

Amble along the city's famous tree-flanked promenade, and stop off at one of the many kiosks where locals call in for coffee-fuelled catch-ups all day long.

2

### NIGHTLIFE

Tel Aviv after dark can easily sweep you along until dawn. Whether it's happy hour on a rooftop bar around Allenby and King George Streets, or letting your hair down in one of the world-class clubs like The Block, a night out here is legendary.

3

### BREAKFAST

Once you've recovered, starting your day the Israeli way is a must. Go for one of the trays loaded with Levantine nibbles at Bucke to set yourself up for the day, or grab a coffee and one of the excellent bagels at Cafe XoHo. [bucke-cafe.com](http://bucke-cafe.com) [cafexoho.com](http://cafexoho.com)

4

### SEA & SAND

With 300 days of sunshine a year, there's always an excuse to hit the beach. Come, kick back with a book (or borrow one from the mobile library carts that can often be found on the sands), take in the sea breeze and envy the locals' good looks.

5

### BAUHAUS

2019 will be the centenary of Bauhaus, and Tel Aviv has over 4,000 Bauhaus-style buildings — more than anywhere else. The best are in Lev HaIr. Visit the Bauhaus Museum or the Bauhaus Center. [bauhaus-center.com](http://bauhaus-center.com)



## Kerem HaTeimanim and Lev HaIr

**At Sabich Tchernichovsky, I'm holding heaven in my hands. Bulging with colour, *sabich* knocks all hazy memories of kebab out of the park: tahini-slathered pitta loaded with roasted aubergine and egg, piled with salad and *amba*, a piquant mango pickle. "It's good, huh?" Anat mumbles between mouthfuls. I'm too enraptured to manage more than a nod in agreement.**

After washing it down with lemonade, we head into Carmel Market round the corner. I lose sight of her more than once, my attention grabbed by the likes of garish flip-flops and huge trays of baklava. I hear the sound of oranges being squeezed behind me somewhere, from another direction the strains of Europop, all underpinned by raucous shouts in Hebrew and Arabic.

But one right turn and, almost unnaturally, the chaos gives into the quiet of Kerem HaTeimanim, or the Yemenite Quarter. Developed by the Yemenite Jewish families who settled in the area in the early 1900s, this calm, mostly residential part of town feels oddly disconnected to the bustling city that envelops it. Pastel-coloured houses are festooned with bougainvillea, cyclists stop for hummus at family-run cafes, and doorsteps are guarded by slinky, half-asleep cats. We call in for coffee at Yom Tov Cafe and then sweet, rose-scented *malabi* pudding at HaMalabiya.

Meanwhile, across the street, Lev HaIr — 'city centre' in English — is a bold hub of urban architecture. There are the clean lines of the Tel Aviv Museum of Art housing a collection of works by Israeli artists, but there's also the magpie of the architecture world. Fanciful and flamboyant, eclecticism borrows bits and pieces from other styles, with some of Tel Aviv's highlights being the Pagoda Building with its oriental flair, the exotic-looking Levine House, and the mustard-coloured facade of the bustling Hotel Montefiore.

But Tel Aviv serves up an even bigger architectural heavyweight. Off the main drag of Allenby Street, there's peace in Bialik Square, the heart of the world's highest concentration of Bauhaus buildings. When the Nazis shut down the Bauhaus School of Design in 1933, deeming it a bastion of illicit idealism, many of the Jewish architects there fled Germany and settled here, in what would become Israel. Bauhaus then rapidly and dramatically shaped early Tel Aviv's skyline, its design more practical than beautiful: straight lines to maximise space, flat roofs that could be repurposed, minimal decoration and a muted colour scheme to reflect the heat — it's this that earned this part of town the 'White City' moniker. On paper, it could all err on the dull side, but a stroll through Lev HaIr reveals a subdued, harmonious beauty to this rather utilitarian art.





## Florentin

'Stay hungry, stay foolish,' screams Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu from a piece of street art. Nearby, a miniature Alice in Wonderland is poised with a can reading 'Spray Me'. It's a brazen introduction to Florentin, Tel Aviv's most alternative district.

"There were lots of warehouses, factories, shops here that were derelict," says Ross Belfer. New Jerseyan-turned-Tel Avivian, he heads up Eager Tourist, which runs hyperlocal tours throughout the city. "So for the people who moved to Florentin, they had an ugly blank canvas to create their own community."

What was Tel Aviv's industrial quarter has now emerged as the city's hipster magnet, its once-cheap rents drawing arty upstarts who don't mind slumming it a little. Not that Florentin's much of a slum these days. Now a sought-after corner of town, it ticks along with an easy, effortless neighbourhood feel: at Yom Tov Deli, I peruse coloured tins of fish, *dolma* (stuffed vine leaves) and mounds of olives. Round the corner are swish tattoo parlours and furniture showrooms, little tailors crammed with clothes, vibrant bars on street corners and shops selling huge pales of loose tea.

"I know where we can go for something refreshing," says Ross. "Do you like vinegar?"

At Cafe Levinsky 41, the long-haired Benny Briga is chatting to customers in his truck-cum-seating area. Beaming, he offers us a *gazoz*. I confess I've never had one before, nervously eying the obscure jars and bottles stacked in his pint-sized cafe. Barista Lisa gets to work on the drinks. "The vibe here in Florentin is great," she says, yanking stems from a vase and stuffing them into a glass. "I came from Toronto to visit a friend and never left." And so she hands me a glass of *gazoz* — a tangy, vinegary, fermented *kombucha*-like beverage, dashed with fruit syrup and served with a healthy helping of flowers.

Lisa's not the only expat drawn in by Florentin's rough-diamond charm: the young tattoo artist I speak to down the street is Ukrainian, a waitress who serves me is Turkish, and I hear French and Russian in the streets. After all, multicultural Florentin even owes its name to a Greek Jew who first bought the land here.

From Casbah Florentin, the shabby-chicest of cafes full of twenty-somethings with laptops, I watch as a woman unhurriedly cleans up after her pug on the pavement opposite. Florentin's no beauty queen, but she doesn't hide it. It's this unpretentious, in-your-face realness that keeps those laptop-tapping hipsters plugged in. □

**ABOVE FROM LEFT:** The laptop crowd at hipster hotspot Casbah Florentin; a *gazoz* drink at Cafe Levinsky 41

## MORE INFO

Puaa. [rol.co.il/sites/eng/puaa](http://rol.co.il/sites/eng/puaa)  
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# Sleep MANHATTAN

**Want to stay in Manhattan's hippest hoods? From design digs in SoHo to old-world glamour in NoMad, we've found you the best beds with benefits: rooftop pools, epic views, and free wine hours... Words: Nicola Trup & Pat Riddell**



New York City is forever changing. Restaurants come and go, railway lines become parks, and skyscrapers spring up like daisies. And the city's hotel scene is in constant flux too, with new addresses opening their doors faster than you can say 'Where's my credit card?'. Nowhere is this more the case than in Manhattan, with many of its best hotels found between Chelsea and SoHo. Whether it's a boutique bolthole or a seriously stylish chain, bedding down in the city's most famous borough means you're never far from the action. Many of New York's best museums, restaurants and green spaces are all just a walk away.





## For design

££ 11 HOWARD

Leading the charge for hipsterisation in a still slightly scruffy corner of SoHo, 11 Howard may be cloaked in a bright and brash, multistorey mural, but inside it's a Scandi minimalist's dream. No surprise, then, that the creative force behind the decor in this converted post office is Danish design studio Space Copenhagen. It's decked out the place with mid-century-inspired furniture and what might just be the city's most beautiful bathrooms.

**Atmospheric bar** The Blond has a different vibe altogether, though; the velvet couches, smoked mirrors and bar stacked with high-end liquor bottles have made it a go-to spot for models and socialites.

**ROOMS:** Doubles from \$165 (£129), room only.  
[designhotels.com](http://designhotels.com)





## For views

### **THE NEW YORK EDITION**

With its spire and sharp angles, the Edition gives off some serious Gotham City vibes. It was once the world's tallest building, and this 41-storey clock tower still looms over many of its neighbours; as a result, you get fabulous views of the Empire State Building from some of the upper-floor rooms. It's owned by the man credited with inventing the boutique hotel, Ian Schrager — so everything's tastefully restrained. Rooms definitely don't come cheap, but if you have some cash left to flash, sit down for a meal at Jason Atherton's Michelin-starred restaurant, The Clocktower. **ROOMS:** Doubles from \$595 (£460), room only. [editionhotels.com/new-york](http://editionhotels.com/new-york)

## For families

### FREEHAND

Something of a cross between a boutique hotel and a hostel, Freehand is budget-friendly without being all function and no form. It's kitted out with retro furniture and custom pieces by art students from New York State's Bard College, and there are five cafes, restaurants and bars — including the rooftop Broken Shaker. Yet, you won't just find double rooms and suites here — there are four-person bunk rooms, as well as triples in which your child can sleep in a cabin bed above your head.

**ROOMS:** Triples from \$179 (£139), room only.

[freehandhotels.com/new-york](http://freehandhotels.com/new-york)

## For entertainment

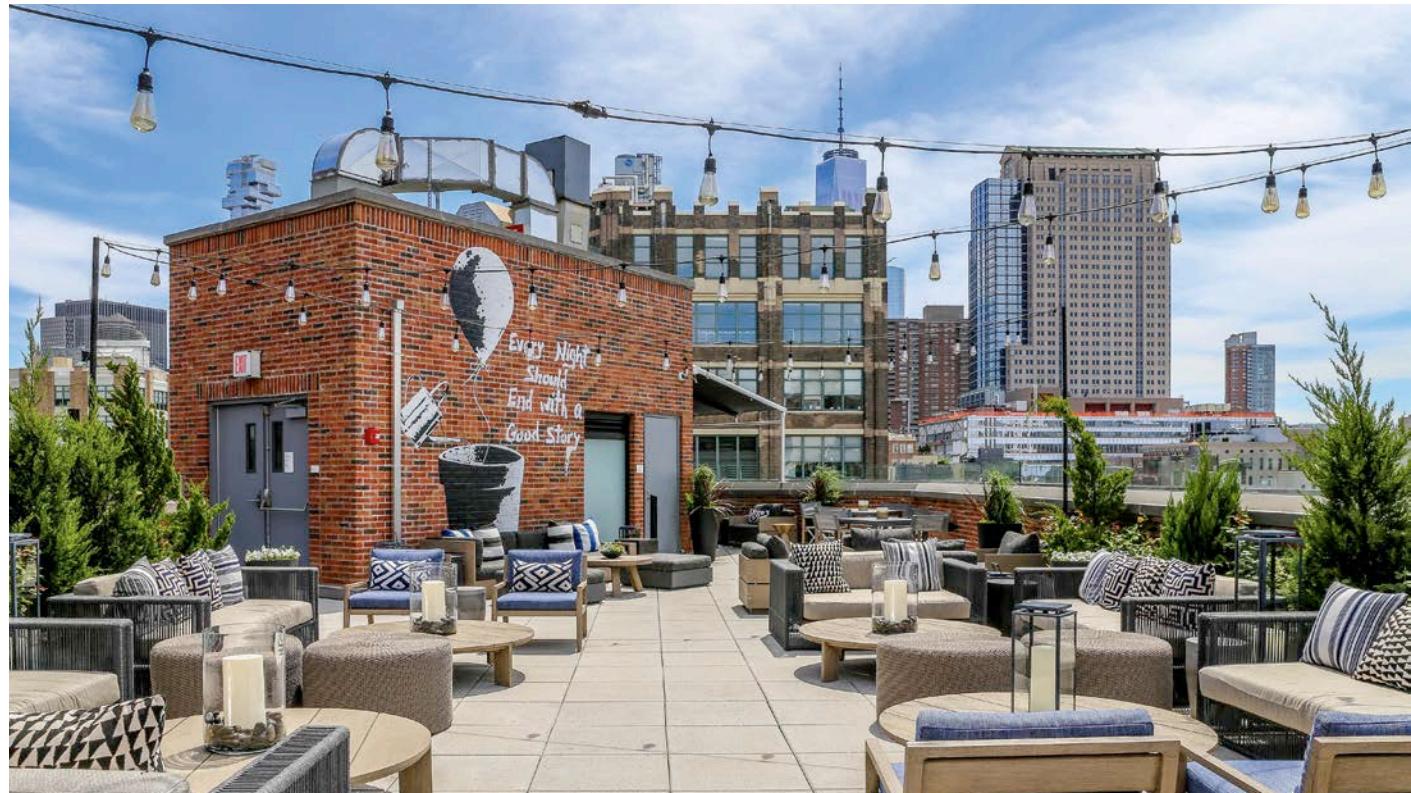
### ARLO SOHO

**ROOMS:** It may offer what it calls 'micro rooms', but Arlo SoHo makes up for its compact quarters with its many public spaces, where there's always something going on. Choose from live music sessions, photography workshops, spirit tastings and rooftop exercise classes, or settle down on a couch in the Living Room for the weekly movie night, when you can eat dinner from the hotel's Harold's Meat + Three restaurant while you watch. There are also regular 'vinyl hours' in the Library, during which you can sift through the hotel's record collection.

**ROOMS:** Doubles from \$160 (£123), room only.

[arlohotels.com](http://arlohotels.com)

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## For being seen

**£££ MONDRIAN PARK AVENUE**

In a prime position on the corner of Park Avenue and East 30th Street, spitting distance from both the Flatiron District and Empire State Building, this 2017 opening is the fifth Mondrian in the sleek, design-led group. The 20-storey, 189-room hotel has a distinctly boutique feel with a small, sparse lobby which gives few clues to its actual size. The rooftop bar and basement club give it added cache but it's the Cleo restaurant that really makes it a destination. Headed up by chef Danny Elmaleh, the menu's based on the Eastern and Southern Mediterranean region. More importantly, it has a separate feel from the hotel and is clearly a hit with locals.

**ROOMS:** Doubles from \$459 (£355), room only. [morganshotelgroup.com/mondrian](http://morganshotelgroup.com/mondrian)

## For dining

**£££ HOTEL 50 BOWERY**

It takes guts to try to compete with Chinatown but 50 Bowery's Rice & Gold restaurant is going for it. With a lengthy Asian-fusion menu, you don't even need to set foot outside the hotel to get your fix of dumplings, noodles and fluffy bao buns. Later, join the crowd for a nightcap at the rooftop bar, The Crown. The rooms are decorated to a formula (grey palette, concrete ceilings, quirky art) but are a whole lot hipper than the hotel's glossy tower-block exterior might suggest.

**ROOMS:** Doubles from \$269 (£208), room only.

[jdvhoteles.com](http://jdvhoteles.com)

## For old world glamour

**£££ THE NOMAD HOTEL**

Built in 1903, this landmark beaux-arts building has been considerably restored by French designer Jacques Garcia. The 168 rooms and suites have real character and are styled in keeping with the building, meaning even the occasional mod-con is subtlety disguised. Freestanding roll-top baths, vintage-style furniture and original artwork ensure the unique feel. The Michelin-starred restaurant, and cocktails in the Elephant Bar complete the formula for European decadence.

**ROOMS:** Doubles from \$275 (£213), room only.

[thenomadhotel.com](http://thenomadhotel.com)

## For hipsters

**£ ACE HOTEL NEW YORK**

Millennials tapping away on MacBooks? Check. Distressed original floor tiles and wooden features in a turn-of-the-century building? Check. Hipster coffee shop, oyster bar and boutique shop? Check. The Ace Hotel might almost be a pastiche of a style sweeping urban areas across the globe, but it all feels very natural rather than forced. The distinctly multipurpose, retro-cool property on the corner of Broadway and 29th offers rooms in a range of budgets.

**ROOMS:** Twin bunks from \$179 (£139), room only.

[acehotel.com/newyork](http://acehotel.com/newyork)



## For service

### ££ KIMPTON HOTEL EVENTI

Warm, welcoming and enthusiastic, the greeting at this Kimpton is exactly what you need in a frenetic city like New York. The buzzing Italian restaurant L'Amico serves exquisite pastas and pizza, while a daily, free wine hour is a signature Kimpton bonus. Some rooms and suites provide glimpses of the Empire State Building and views across 6th Avenue. Decor is sleek, refined and modern but comfortable too, and the beds enormous. The 'Forgot List?', meanwhile, is a treasure trove of phone chargers, plug adapters, deodorant, hairdryers, coffee makers and so on. Style and substance is a rare thing.

**ROOMS:** Doubles from \$229 (£177), room only.  
[hoteleventi.com](http://hoteleventi.com)

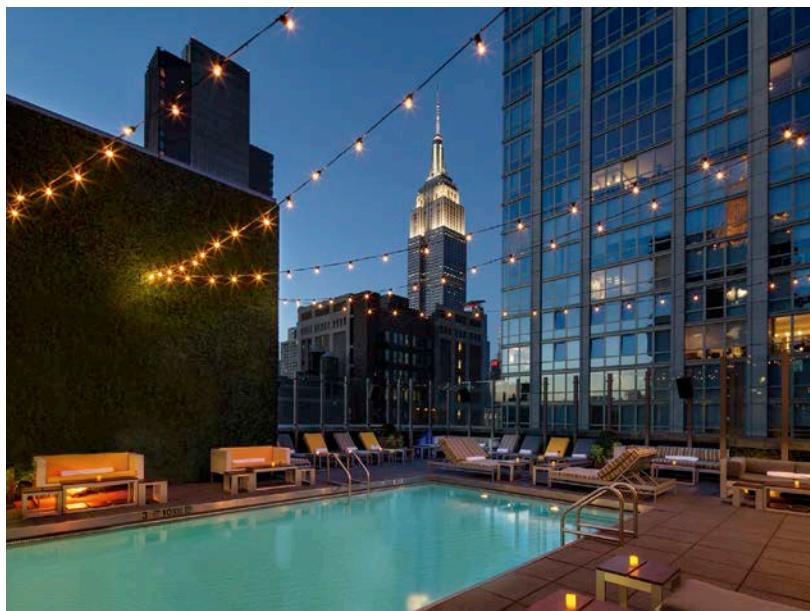


## For a rooftop pool

### ££ ROYALTON PARK AVENUE

The Empire State Building likes to show off, and it does just that when you're on the roof of Royalton Park Avenue — a prominent address on the city's most elite street. The 20-storey rooftop space is kitted out with a year-round heated pool (with ample seating and the occasional DJ set), a plush bar/lounge with speciality cocktails, brunch, and one of the best panoramic vistas in town. The hotel itself, formerly an upscale apartment block, has 249 rooms and suites with Juliet balconies — all surprisingly large compared to the average New York hotel room. Ristorante Asellina, the dimly lit Italian eatery, serves feel-good food like tagliatelle bolognese.

**ROOMS:** Doubles from \$220 (£170), room only.  
[royaltonparkavenue.com](http://royaltonparkavenue.com)



ROYALTON PARK AVENUE. WORDS: FARIDA ZEYNALOVA

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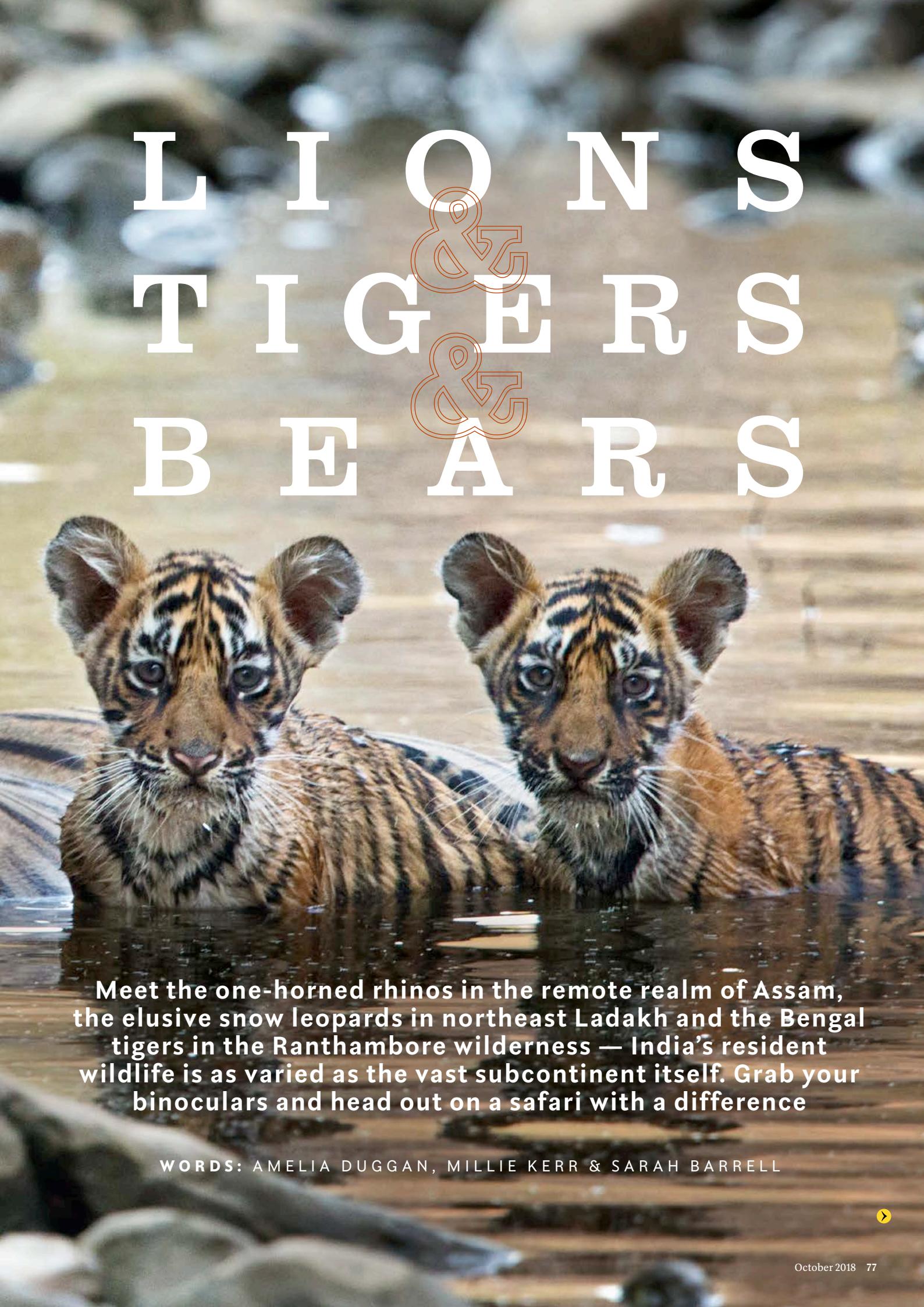
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IMAGE: SUPERSTOCK

# LIONS & TIGERS & BEARS

A close-up photograph of two young tiger cubs partially submerged in water. They are looking directly at the camera with their heads above the surface. Their dark brown fur with distinct orange stripes is clearly visible, and their whiskers are prominent. The background is blurred, showing more of the water and possibly a rocky shore.

Meet the one-horned rhinos in the remote realm of Assam, the elusive snow leopards in northeast Ladakh and the Bengal tigers in the Ranthambore wilderness — India's resident wildlife is as varied as the vast subcontinent itself. Grab your binoculars and head out on a safari with a difference

WORDS: AMELIA DUGGAN, MILLIE KERR & SARAH BARRELL







## ONE-HORNED RHINOCEROS

KAZIRANGA NATIONAL PARK, ASSAM

Rain is coming. The tree canopies rustle in anticipation. The long elephant grass starts to sway. Birds burst from high branches, wings fanning through the charged air. "Now," whispers Babloo from the driver's seat of our safari jeep. One, two, three seconds later, the downpour hits us on cue. We've taken shelter on the edge of a copse where bearded vines loop between the trees like wild doodles. Out on the open floodplains of Kaziranga National Park, rain drenches creation. But here the water just pit-patters over head. It all feels very cosy. Benign. But that's just an illusion.

"The monsoon is a deadly time," says Gautam, my young guide. I've arrived in late April — the end of the safari season in Kaziranga. The first rains have swollen the Brahmaputra and soon it'll burst, submerging these flatlands for the summer months. "That's when the poachers move in," he tells me gravely. Their target: the horn of the Indian rhino, *rhinoceros unicornis*, which fetches its weight in gold on the Chinese black market as an aphrodisiac. "How many did we lose last year, Babloo?" "Seven," the driver answers. Both men nod. It's a vast improvement on previous years.

With two-thirds of the entire species living here (2,400 at the last count), Kaziranga is the last stronghold of the one-horned rhino. We spot dozens every day in the park, grazing peacefully in far meadows. I watch them through my binoculars, transfixed, until the blood drains from my arms. In a year when the world mourned the death of Sudan — the last male northern white rhino — I'm aware of how precious these sightings are and how rare they might become.

When the downpour peters out, we head off down the muddy track and hit the jackpot: a female rhino grazing alone at the side of the road. It's my first close encounter. She's dumpy-looking with a smiling mouth and beady, myopic black eyes either side of her horn. There's tufty russet fuzz around her ears that catches the light like a halo. She sniffs the air in our direction. Then she's off: a cloud of flies pursuing her as she trots back into the bush. The thick skin of her flanks is folded like fearsome plates of armour, except around

her pimpled rump where it looks like she's failed to hike up a pair of saggy bloomers.

Park rangers are stemming the tide of poaching, due to new surveillance drones and an aggressive 'shoot-on-sight' policy — in 2015, more poachers were killed than rhinos. But heavier and erratic flooding combined with blocked wildlife corridors mean a number of rhinos drown each year. Gautam dishes out this heartbreaking information with a hopeful caveat: conservationists are hoping to fix this by expanding the park's boundaries, and rangers are at work building artificial islands on the plain.

Out on the fringe of the park, on our way back to our lodge for lunch, we detour through some of Assam's famous, electric-green tea plantations and pause in a traditional tribal village of stilt huts. Opposite the village, a couple are wading through a pool each holding the edge of a fishing net, while their children collect fistfuls of water hyacinths. "If they wander off too far... tiger food," Gautham jokes. I hope he's referring to the nearby cows.

Kaziranga has fast become my favourite stop in India. But the state of Assam, tucked below Bhutan in a remote northeastern pocket of territory, isn't on most travellers' radars — or Indians'. "The people on the 'mainland' think we hunt for our food with bows and arrows. Let them, I say," says Mr Roy, the genteel general manager of Diphlu River Lodge, as he leads me to my river-front cottage upon check in — the same one Prince William stayed in on his visit last year. If the charms of Kaziranga are currently a secret, I suspect it's one that might get out soon.

In the evening, Gautam, Babloo and I set out for the Western Range of the park before dusk. We stop beside a lake where scimitar-horned buffalo are wallowing nose-deep, surrounded by pelicans and herons. A rhino chomps grass on the far side, attended by a troupe of jungle miners and white carmines that ride on his back. I'm suppressing the urge to jump from the vehicle and run, Mowgli-like, into this wonderland. As the evening sky burns pink and gold, I say a silent prayer for all my new one-horned friends. I hope the sun never sets on the Indian rhino. **AD**

**DIPHLU RIVER LODGE** offers a Jungle Plan starting at 18,000 INR (£200) including accommodation in one of 12 boutique thatch and bamboo stilt cottages, three meals and two safaris a day (available November to April). A visit to Diphlu River Lodge can be combined with a stay on the houseboat MV Rudra Singha to explore the Brahmaputra River Valley. Transfers to Guwahati Airport (4.5hrs) or Jorhat Airport (2.5hrs) can be arranged at additional cost. [diphluriverlodge.com](http://diphluriverlodge.com)





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Cruises can be combined with Diphlu River Lodge in Kaziranga National Park.

Or, explore the Brahmaputra river aboard your very own private houseboat — the M.V. Rudra Singha.

With a fleet of three ships (soon launching a fourth this year), Assam Bengal Navigation is an Indo-British joint venture, and the largest and most experienced river cruise operator in India.

**TOP  
5**
**ENDANGERED  
LIST**

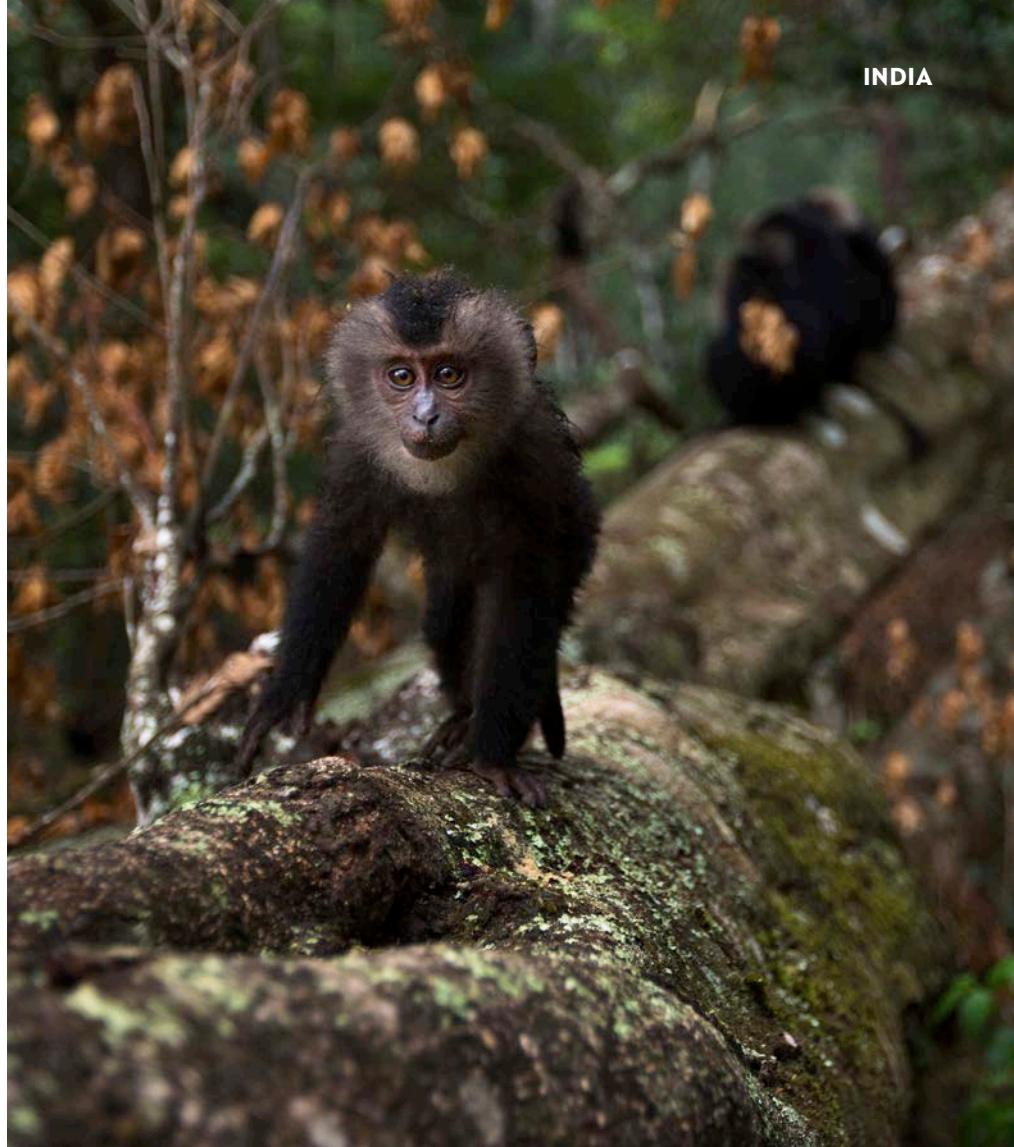
IMAGES: ALAMY; GETTY WORDS: MILLIE KERR

**1 ASIATIC LION**

Western India's Gujarat State is the only place outside of Africa where wild lions survive, but fewer than 650 Asiatic lions remain. Most live in the Gir Forest, but there's talk of moving a number of them to a second location in Madhya Pradesh.

**2 GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD**

This ostrich-like bird was once found in several Indian states, but most of the remaining 200-odd birds now reside in Rajasthan. Hunting and habitat loss continue to plague the bird — one of the world's heaviest flyers, with males weighing up to 16kg.


**3 LION-TAILED MACAQUE**

Named for their lion-like tufted black tails, India's rarest macaque is suffering due to habitat loss and poaching. Fewer than 2,500 remain in Southern India's Western Ghats.

**4 INDIAN RHINOCEROS**

The Indian rhino once roamed all of the northern stretches of the subcontinent, but today only about 3,345 individuals survive in just 10 sites. Around 70% live in Kaziranga National Park.

**5 SANGAI**

The Indian subspecies of brow-antlered deer relies on floating grasslands (*phumdi*) for survival, but in the deer's last remaining habitat, in Manipur, the *phumdi* is thinning, which doesn't bode well for the species. **MK**



**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:** Baby lion-tailed macaque; great Indian bustard, Desert National Park, Rajasthan; sangai, Assam State Zoo-cum-Botanical Garden





## BENGAL TIGER

RANTHAMBORE NATIONAL PARK, RAJASTHAN

The rocky ravines and plateaus of the Aravalli Hills ripple across the skyline like the folds of a saree. This landscape makes for thrilling vistas — and a bone-rattling safari drive — but can be infuriating.

"That's it. We can't follow them any further," Farooq curses from the front passenger seat, peering into the valley below us. Our driver revs the engine and edges the vehicle nearer to the ridge of the basin. All morning we've tracked the paw marks of a mother and two cubs like clues in a treasure hunt, then followed a cacophony of warning cries. The barks of sambar deer and calls of langur monkeys echo in the impassable valley. The tigers are on the move.

"We'll have to give up and try a different territory," Farooq demurs. My frustration quickly dissipates as we roll onwards through Ranthambore and emerge at a lake where scores of snub-nosed marsh crocs bask statue-still on the shore. An iridescent kingfisher dips its wings into the mirrored surface before vanishing into the dazzling sky. It's a fantastic scene.

Scattered around the lake territory are crumbling, domed *chhatris* built by the old maharajas of Jaipur to facilitate their hunting parties. When the British introduced guns to the sport, a massacre ensued: an estimated 80,000 tigers were killed across India between 1875 and 1925. Even the Queen and Prince Philip came to shoot tigers in Ranthambore in the 1960s, before conservationists, like Fateh Singh Rathore, successfully campaigned to stop the bloodshed in 1973. Today just 2,200 tigers remain in India — 62 in Ranthambore.

As we pull up to a ruin, slithering with thick vines and shaded by palms trees, I feel like I've stepped into *The Jungle Book*. Nature has enveloped these remnants of

history and I half expect Shere Khan to leap like liquid fire from the undergrowth and chase us away.

Farooq tells me that this lake territory used to belong to a fearsome tigress named Machali. She would stalk the wetlands' spotted deer, wrestle its giant crocs and wallow in its shallows, completely uninhibited by human onlookers. Until her death in 2016, she was the most photographed tiger in the world. "Photographs are so important in raising global awareness," Farooq tells me. "Who could not come to the aid of the tiger when they know its beauty and the danger it's in?" I'd be more than happy to take some snaps but the new queen of the lakes, Arrowhead, is nowhere to be seen. In fact, all the tigers seem to be having a morning off.

A safari drive in Ranthambore isn't luxurious — its riches lie in its wildlife. Living under the tigers' dominion in the national park are mammals including leopards, striped hyenas, blue bulls, jungle cats, wild cats, caracals, porcupines and mongooses, as well as dozens of reptiles and some 270 bird species. And these animals don't respect the sanctity of park boundaries: big cats have been known to slink into the campstead of Khem Villas where I'm staying. The resident naturalist shows me camera trap footage of a tigress named Lightning prowling through the grounds at night.

On my last safari drive, Farooq and I surprise a sloth bear in a banyan grove. It's a rare sighting. "What luck!" Farooq exclaims. The driver switches off the engine, and as the shaggy black bear slopes away, I subject the party to the chorus of *Bare Necessities*. I don't see a tiger in Ranthambore — but as *The Jungle Book* moments go, I'm still thrilled to have seen Baloo. **AD**

### INSPIRING TRAVEL COMPANY

has a seven-night trip from £2,975 per person, including three nights at Khem Villas, Ranthambore, in a cottage; five private game drives in Ranthambore; three nights at Samode Haveli, Jaipur in a deluxe suite; and one night in Delhi at the Holiday Inn. This price also includes international flights, car transfers, and train travel from Delhi to Ranthambore. [inspiringtravelcompany.co.uk](http://inspiringtravelcompany.co.uk)



**TOP  
4  
TIGER  
HOTSPOTS**

**1 BANDHAVGARH  
NATIONAL PARK,  
MADHYA PRADESH**

Some 50 tigers live here, making sightings relatively frequent. The scenery is magical, too: the area has been the seat of numerous dynasties dating back to 800BC and is peppered with romantic ruins. [bandhavgarh-national-park.com](http://bandhavgarh-national-park.com)

**2 TADOBÀ-ANDHARI  
TIGER RESERVE,  
MAHARASHTRA**

The secret's out: Tadoba is currently the best place to spot a big cat. Over 60 tigers live among its teak forests and lakes at the last count, and the density of this population means most tiger enthusiasts leave happy. [mahatadobatiger.com](http://mahatadobatiger.com)

**3 KANHA NATIONAL  
PARK, MADHYA  
PRADESH**

Kanha is considered one of India's most beautiful parks. It's home to 40-45 tigers but sightings have decreased over recent years, and so it's worth spending upwards of three days on safari to increase the odds. [kanha-national-park.com](http://kanha-national-park.com)

**4 CORBETT  
TIGER RESERVE,  
UTTARAKHAND**

This vast wilderness in the foothills of the Kumaon region is partly out of bounds to visitors, dedicating its heartlands purely to conservation. It's still a stunning place to look for big cats, although its 215 tigers are known to be elusive. [corbettonline.uk.gov.in](http://corbettonline.uk.gov.in)

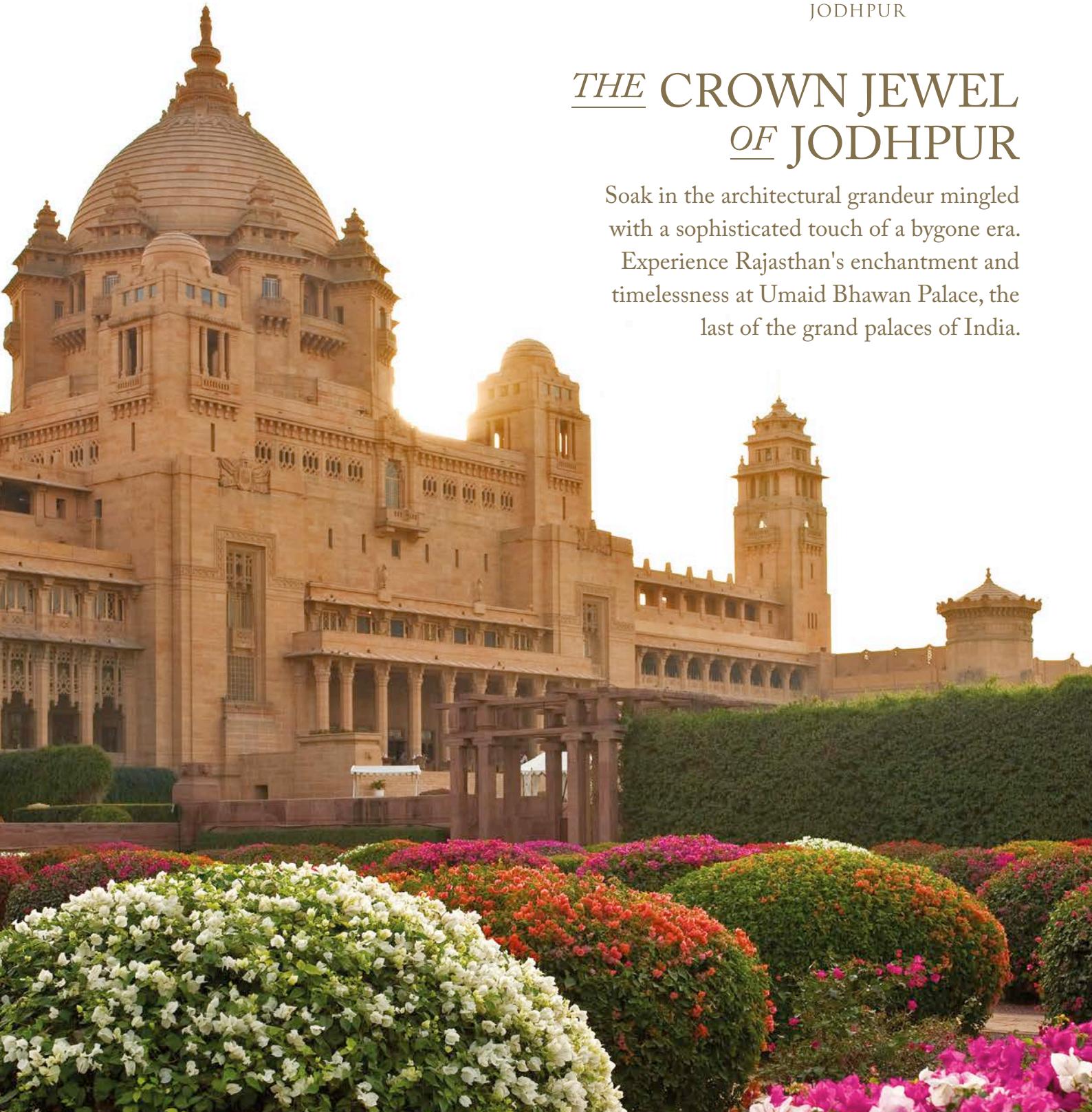


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## ASIATIC LION

**DR GITANJALI BHATTACHARYA**

ZSL's Asia Conservation Programmes team

**THE MAIN MORPHOLOGICAL DIFFERENCE** between the Asiatic lion and the African subspecies is the distinctive fold of skin that runs along the African lion's abdomen. Invisible differences include a bifurcated infraorbital foramina: two small holes in the lion's skull serving as channels for the nerves and blood vessels leading to the eyes, whereas African lions have only one.

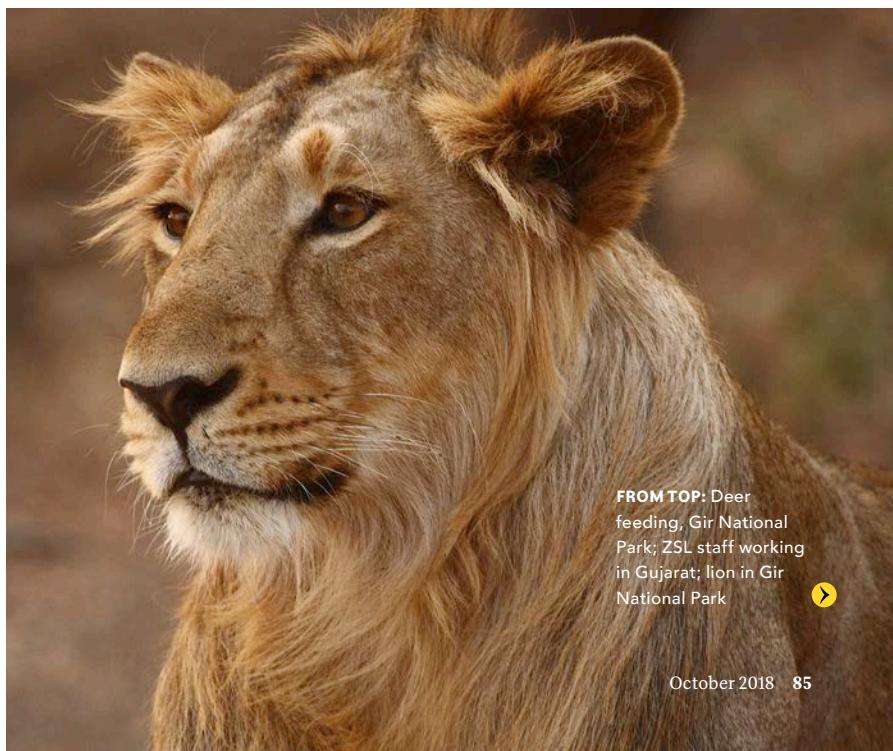
**ACCORDING TO THE LAST COUNT CONDUCTED** in 2017, there are just over 600 lions in Gujarat. Asiatic lions are endangered and live in and around the Gir National Park and Wildlife Sanctuary amid the dry deciduous forest dominated by teak.

**ASIATIC LIONS CAN BE SEEN** in Gir National Park and Wildlife Sanctuary. They are also found in five satellite protected areas and adjoining landscapes around the park. Gir National Park operates a strict entry policy with a limited tourism zone.

**THE ASIATIC LION IS AN ICONIC SPECIES** that holds great cultural and spiritual significance across the region. These majestic animals have grace, agility and complex social structures including male coalitions and bonds within the prides. There is a model of harmonious co-existence between Asiatic lions and the people who live alongside them in Gujarat, which works successfully.

### INTERNATIONAL CONSERVATION CHARITY

ZSL (Zoological Society of London) is working closely with the Wildlife Institute of India and Gujarat Forest Department to share information and strengthen veterinary and animal husbandry initiatives, including equipping and training frontline staff and veterinarians in safe immobilisation techniques used to relocate injured animals or animals that may come into potential conflict. [zsl.org](http://zsl.org) SB



FROM TOP: Deer feeding, Gir National Park; ZSL staff working in Gujarat; lion in Gir National Park



## BARASINGHA DEER

KANHA NATIONAL PARK, MADHYA PRADESH

The sun is starting to set over Kanha National Park. We weave through the forest, tall *sal* trees lining roads covered in crunchy orange leaves. We're within a kilometre of the Mukki Gate when my guide, Raj, points out a *barasingha* family standing beside a water hole, the sun striking the swamp deers' golden backs. Suddenly, a doe bounds towards the water and wades in so deep she's practically swimming. The others follow one by one, a fawn hesitating at the water's edge before taking the plunge. This park may be a hotspot for tigers, but it's also famed for its *barasinghas*, and since I've arrived guests and guides alike have been talking about how numbers of the endangered deer are rising.

I grew up in Central Texas, where white-tailed deer are so prolific I became immune to their elegance. It never occurred to me that I'd get my camera out for deer, particularly when visiting a country that boasts big cats. But *barasinghas* are special; males are adorned with enviable horns — the animal's name means '12-horned' in Hindi, although some antlers possess 15 points. More importantly, the southern subspecies only lives in Kanha. *Barasinghas* nearly became extinct in the 1960s, but conservation efforts brought them back from the brink.

Ranjitsinh Jhala, the former chairman of Wildlife Trust of India, counted just 64 individuals in Kanha in 1967 when he began efforts to protect them. The population had plummeted because of hunting and habitat loss. As communities adopted more intensive forms of agriculture, grasslands became croplands, which decimated *barasingha* habitat.

"*Barasinghas* are overly specialised," says Ranjitsinh. "They only live in grasslands and can't adapt to forests." The conservationist was determined to save the *barasingha*, even

if it meant moving tigers out of Kanha. It didn't come to that; instead, Ranjitsinh's efforts led the park to stop the practice of leaving bait for tigers — then a popular tactic to guarantee sightings for tourists. Kanha also increased in size, and authorities began relocating villages from Kanha's centre to its perimeter. These days, no villagers reside in the 'core zone'. No lodges are permitted there, either. Gradually, the area of grassland increased, helping Kanha's prized deer to thrive again; 750 individuals now call the park home.

The air is crisp during the next morning's game drive. At 6.15, the cars at Khatia Gate stream into the park like ants searching for food. We peel off from the others and find ourselves in a meadow. Wrapped in blankets, I scan the landscape for signs of life but see nothing besides the occasional flapping of wings. Raj tells us to look out for *barasinghas*, and we soon come upon a herd grazing, but the animals have their heads down and their coats blend into the heather.

All morning, I struggle to tell them apart from India's largest deer, the *sambar*, which is also facing extinction. Over dinner that evening, my other guide, Mohan, shares some tips: unlike the *sambar*'s brown coat, the *barasingha*'s has a red or golden hue and its ears are shaped like leaves. The *sambar*'s, meanwhile, are rounded, and they're solitary forest-dwellers, whereas *barasingha* herds are usually found in grasslands or at water holes.

After dinner, we sit around a crackling fire, and Mohan muses about his favourite time of year. "In October, sugarcane grasses are at their peak, and *barasingha* stags get new antlers that come in a velvety pink," he tells me. "Seeing them against the tall grasses is a beautiful sight." MK

**ABERCROMBIE & KENT**  
offers a 10-night trip to India from £3,330 per person including all flights, private transfers, sightseeing and accommodation, with three nights at Flame of the Forest Safari Lodge in Kanha National Park, full board. Visit in winter, when daytime temperatures are moderate. Kanha National Park is only open between October and June, so it's best to book early as a limited number of park entry permits are issued.  
[abercrombiekent.co.uk](http://abercrombiekent.co.uk)

RIGHT: Barasingha, Kanha National Park





## SNOW LEOPARD

HEMIS NATIONAL PARK, JAMMU & KASHMIR

*Om mani padme hum.* This sacred Buddhist invocation of compassion is one I've often seen carved on prayer wheels or heard recited behind monastery walls. Now the words are being chanted for my protection and good fortune to the spirit, or *la*, of a high-altitude Himalayan pass — possibly under the gaze of nature's most elusive and revered big cat.

While our group's local guides murmur, unfurl strings of prayer flags and douse our impromptu roadside ceremony with fistfuls of incense, I squint up at the hillsides for signs of movement. A few hundred snow leopards prowl Ladakh's plateaus, making the region a veritable haven for the species. But actually seeing a snow leopard, even when camping out in the wilds for a week with Naturetrek's experts, is far from a given. We'll need plenty of luck. *Om mani padme hum*, indeed.

Our small group of British travellers, together with the local spotters and our naturalist, Sujan, drives on through the broad, brown lunar landscapes of Hemis National Park until the road runs out. Here, our camp has already been set up for us: a circle of bell tents beside a frozen river, plus two canvas pavilions — one for cooking; one for dining. A shaggy domestic yak owned by a nearby village loiters expectantly, hoping for scraps.

"Denzel!" Sujan calls out, recognising the animal from last year's trip. "Good to see you again." We warm up with campfire-brewed chai as our guide cautions us against running off to explore the valley. "Today we rest. You're not used to being at over 14,000ft and it would be inconvenient to have to evacuate you if you got acute mountain sickness," Sujan jokes darkly. "We take it slowwwly. Like a yak. Plod. Plod..." He pauses. "Ploddd."

From where we're camped, there's plenty to spot. Golden eagles, griffons and vultures sail across the cloudless sky; snow cocks scutter through stubbly bracken, and *pikas* (a rabbit-like mammal) play hide and seek among the boulders of the river banks. The highlight of the afternoon comes when one spotter, Thamchoss, spies some stocky, thick-horned blue sheep — the favourite meal of the snow leopard. We train our binoculars and spotting scopes on the herd and wish them ill.

The next morning, I'm woken up by a commotion: voices; the rasp of opening tent zips; more voices. Lying in the centre of our camp, hooves akimbo, is Denzel. "This is an ex yak," Sujan pronounces gravely. "Did a leopard get him?" I gasp. "I wish," he scoffs, pointing out the trail of half-chomped carrots leading back to the collapsed kitchen tent. "It seems like Denzel's midnight feast went awry."

We don't have long to mourn; a passing goat herder brings news of a sighting near Rumbak village. Temples throbbing and lungs heaving, we reach the outskirts of the village by mid-morning and set up our tripods to scan the landscape. Our spotter Dorje sees it first: "Duk! Duk! Shan!" he exclaims. I've got it! Snow leopard! He's seen a head briefly peeking out from behind a rock. It's an astonishing achievement, like finding a needle in a haystack — except the needle is also perfectly camouflaged. We point our scopes at the rock and wait for it to return. Eventually, our leopard emerges and stalks across the slope. There's raw power in its gait, the promise of terrifying speeds in its muscular flanks and large paws. Its tail is surprisingly long, thick to the tip; its jaw is square; its eyes dark, wide-set almonds. Its famous pelage — the pelt leopards are still poached for — is pale and clouded by dark

rosettes. When it finally takes its leave, it moves agilely along the ridge of the valley and then is gone. We look round at each other in awe. Did that really happen?

Spirits are high and the pressure is off for the rest of the week. We hike into different valleys each day to look for leopards and, along the way, discover incredible artifacts: stupas strung with diaphanous prayer flags; ancient petroglyphs carved into rocks lit with fire-coloured lichens; and fossils dating back 50 million years to the creation of the Himalayas. It's all spectacular but, like the snow leopard, vulnerable: the region is on the front line of climate change, with rising temperatures across the mountain range threatening its ancient cultures and wildlife.

Towards the end of the week, I pass my most memorable birthday to date tracking the pugmarks of leopards and wolves, and fall asleep with a belly full of yak stew. "Denzel was a wonderful yak, inside and out," Sujan had joked, making us all squirm. The cooks had even managed to procure a cake for me, and I had only one wish.

It comes true the very next day — our penultimate in the park — just as the sun is setting, crowning the distant peaks with shimmering halos. The group is silent, each of us soaking in the scenery or casually scanning the craggy valley, when Dorje, with his eye glued to his scope, starts shouting. "Duk! Duk! Duk!" **AD**

Snow leopard resting on a lichen covered rock in Hemis National Park, Ladakh



**NATURETREK'S**  
14-day Ladakh: A Snow Leopard Quest costs from £2,995 per person (based on two sharing) including direct British Airways flights from London to Delhi, transfers, accommodation, all meals (except lunches and dinners in Delhi) and the services of a naturalist. Departs 14 February 2019. [naturetrek.co.uk](http://naturetrek.co.uk)



## SLOTH BEAR

**DR HARENDRA SINGH BARGALI**

*Deputy director of the Corbett Foundation and co-chair of the IUCN/BSG Sloth Bear Expert Team*

**SLOTH BEARS ARE ENDEMIC TO THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT** and only survive in India, Nepal and Sri Lanka. They're medium-sized bears with shaggy black coats and V- or U-shaped chest blazes. It's the only bear that's specially adapted to eating insects.

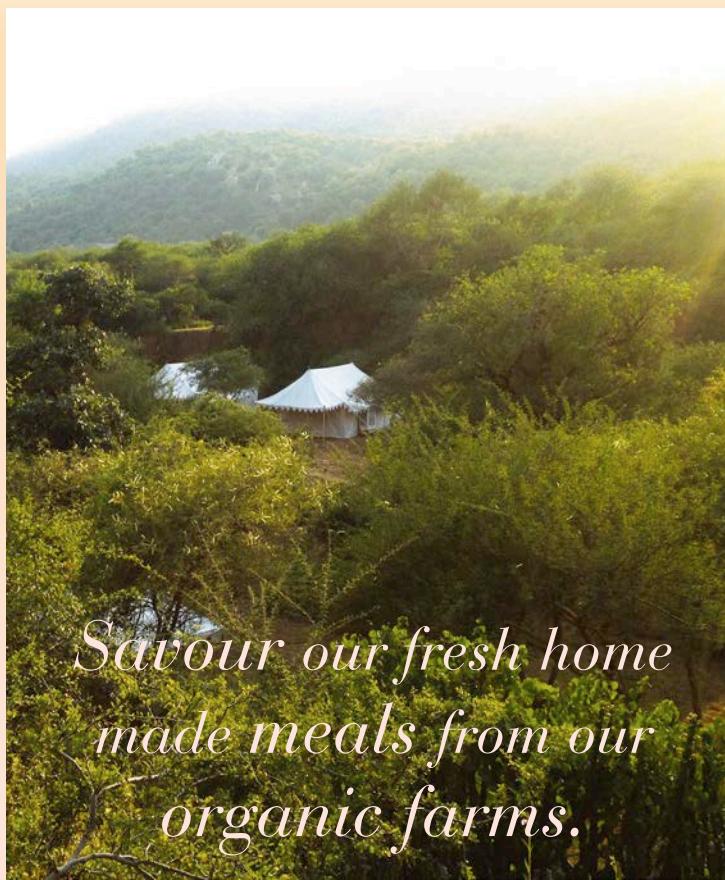
**LIKE OTHER LARGE MAMMALS, SLOTH BEARS PLAY A KEY ROLE** in maintaining their ecosystem. But, unlike some of India's most charismatic species — tigers, elephants, and rhinos — they receive little attention from donors, government and NGOs, so there's a lack of information on their status and ecological role.

**ALTHOUGH THEY HAVEN'T BECOME A PRIORITY SPECIES IN INDIA,** sloth bears receive protection from the Indian Wildlife Protection Act, as well as CITES. The IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) lists them as 'vulnerable' to extinction. As with many species, their main threat is loss and fragmentation of habitat. In the past 50 years, their historic range shrank by nearly 40%. In India, half of all sloth bears live outside of protected areas — bad for bears and people. Conflict sometimes arises, and people also kill bears to trade their body parts.

**TRAVELLERS WILL HAVE THE BEST SHOT OF SPOTTING THEM** at the Daroji sloth bear Sanctuary in Karnataka in the south west of the country. Sightings also occur in the tiger reserves in Madhya Pradesh. And because many sloth bears live outside of protected areas, people can observe them while travelling outside of national parks and sanctuaries. [corbettfoundation.org](http://corbettfoundation.org) MK

**LEFT:** Sloth bears, Sandur Mountain Range, Karnataka

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**TOP  
8**

# NATIONAL PARKS

## 1 BANDHAVGARH NATIONAL PARK, MADHYA PRADESH

**TELL ME MORE:** This national park tops India's tiger spotting charts, with around 50 tigers in a 100sq km area.

**WHAT TO SEE:** If you're looking to tick off the felines on a safari, then this will prove a popular spot, but there are plenty of other animals here, including chital, sambar and barking deer, wild boar, antelope, Indian bison, wild dogs, leopards, blue bulls, and bears.

**WHEN TO GO:** It's hot but April-June sees wildlife congregating around watering holes, and there's better chance of spotting more elusive species.

## 2 DUDHWA NATIONAL PARK, UTTAR PRADESH

**TELL ME MORE:** On the border of Nepal, Dudhwa is a great place to spot one-horned rhino, abundant since being reintroduced.

**WHAT TO SEE:** Daily Forest Department safaris are a good way to access this lodge-lite park. These also take in Dudhwa's herds of wild elephants and its healthy population of the state animal, barasinghas (swamp deer), which can be spotted near the Suheli River.

**WHEN TO GO:** November-April. As with most of the northern/mountainous parks, you'll need warm clothes December-January.

## 3 PERIYAR NATIONAL PARK, KERALA

**TELL ME MORE:** Periyar is a well-known tiger reserve and home to numerous Indian elephants.

**WHAT TO SEE:** High in the Cardamom Hills of India's Western Ghats, Periyar is a prime spot for Indian elephant and tiger safaris. This isn't a wilderness experience (peak times can feel more like a safari park), but book an overnight nature trek for the best experience, and the chance to see rare lion-tailed macaques, sambar deer, leopards and Indian bison.

**WHEN TO GO:** November-April. Avoid Indian national holidays to beat the crowds.

Jeep tour in Periyar National Park  
**RIGHT FROM TOP:** Wild Bengal tiger cub in the mangroves of Sundarbans; Rose ringed Parakeet perching on branch at Jim Corbett National Park; Asiatic wild dog at Pench National Park

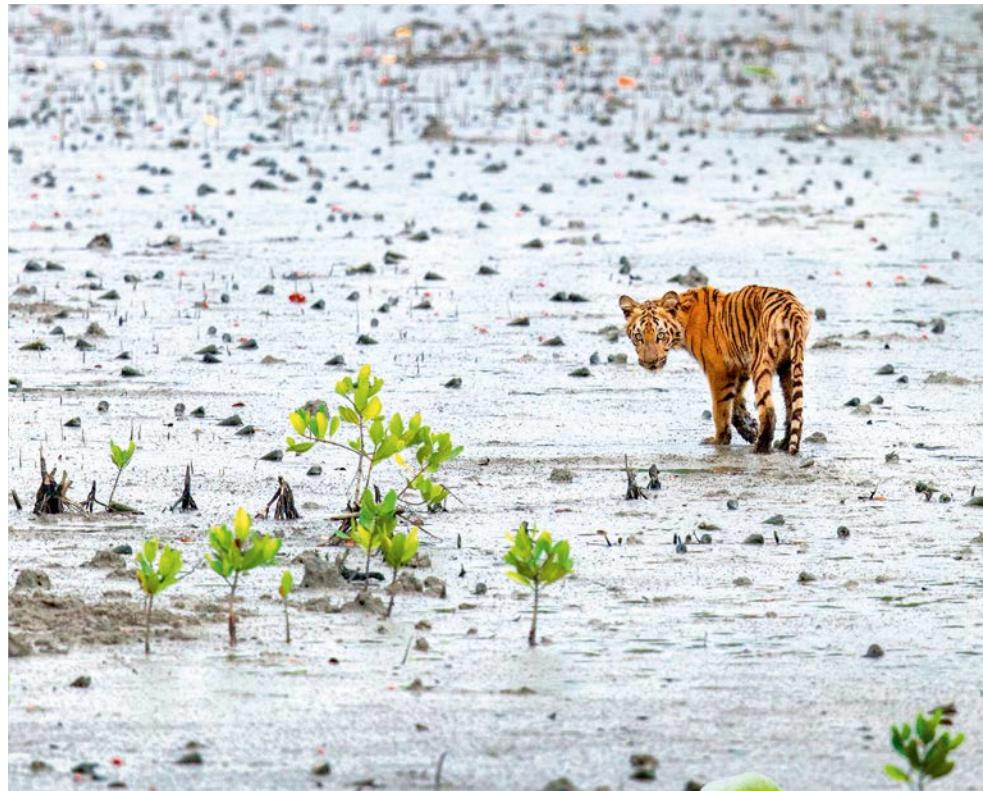
## 4

**SUNDARBANS NATIONAL PARK, WEST BENGAL**

**TELL ME MORE:** The 'beautiful forest' — which is the literal translation of Sundarbans — bordering the Bay of Bengal is in fact a dense, swampy tangle of jungle, mangrove and riverine islands at the mouth of the Ganges and Brahmaputra rivers. It's rich safari territory.

**WHAT TO SEE:** Legendary for its dense population of strong-swimming (but elusive) Bengal tigers, the Sundarbans also hosts an impressive 180 species of bird, the muntjac or 'barking' deer, rhesus monkeys, and water monitors; plus notable conservation work with the Ridley sea turtle, and the world's largest hatchery of estuarine crocodiles.

**WHEN TO GO:** September–March. Summer can be oppressively hot and muggy, with rain disrupting travel plans in this remote region.

**5 JAWAI CONSERVATION RESERVE, RAJASTHAN**

**TELL ME MORE:** Not a national park but a hidden-gem wildlife spot, wedged between Udaipur and Jodhpur, still home to Rabari herdsman.

**WHAT TO SEE:** The real draw here is the remarkable number of leopards existing relatively peacefully alongside humans. Wild grasslands and pastoral fields are patchworked around a huge reservoir, attracting marsh crocodiles, and a boggling abundance of flamingos, cranes and other birds. For big chances of seeing those spotted big cats, book into one of Jawai's few tented camps to take jeep safaris or herdsman-guided hikes into the boulder-strewn hills.

**WHEN TO GO:** December–March.

**6 CORBETT NATIONAL PARK, UTTARAKHAND**

**TELL ME MORE:** India's oldest national park dates back to 1936 and remains an atmospheric place to see the country's headline animals. A pristine northern Indian wilderness in the foothills of the Himalayas, one of Corbett's big draws is its variety of landscapes, from dense forest to wide open grassland and savannah.

**WHAT TO SEE:** Hundreds of tigers and huge herds of wild elephants. You should also be able to spot sloth bears, langur monkeys, rhesus macaques, gharial crocodiles and several species of deer, plus otters and peacocks, along with the Technicolor array of birds you'd expect in such diverse terrain.

**WHEN TO GO:** November–May.

**7 PENCH NATIONAL PARK, MADHYA PRADESH/MAHARASHTRA**

**TELL ME MORE:** Straddling two states, Pench joins Kanha and Bandhavgarh in the top trio of this region's tiger reserves that inspired Rudyard Kipling.

**WHAT TO SEE:** With fewer tigers than its siblings, there are not as many tourists but with some 50 cats in the Madhya Pradesh area, this is still a thriving population. You'll also find endangered Indian wild dogs, langurs, spotted deer, jackals, and wild boar, while the park itself, with dense canopies of large-leaved teak, misty watering holes and wide-open grasslands, is a pretty magical place to just be.

**WHEN TO GO:** December–April.

**8 SASAN-GIR NATIONAL PARK, GUJARAT**

**TELL ME MORE:** These thick, dense forests are the last refuge of the endangered Asiatic lion.

**WHAT TO SEE:** They may not have the bold shaggy heads of African lion, but the Asiatic lion is no less imposing. Gir is the world's very last wild habitat for these majestic mammals, home to just over 500. Not a classic park on the Indian safari circuit, Sasan-Gir is a more relaxed wildlife experience but book ahead to ensure you get a permit. And pop into the crocodile-breeding centre near the permit office to see a dinosaur-like display of hatchlings.

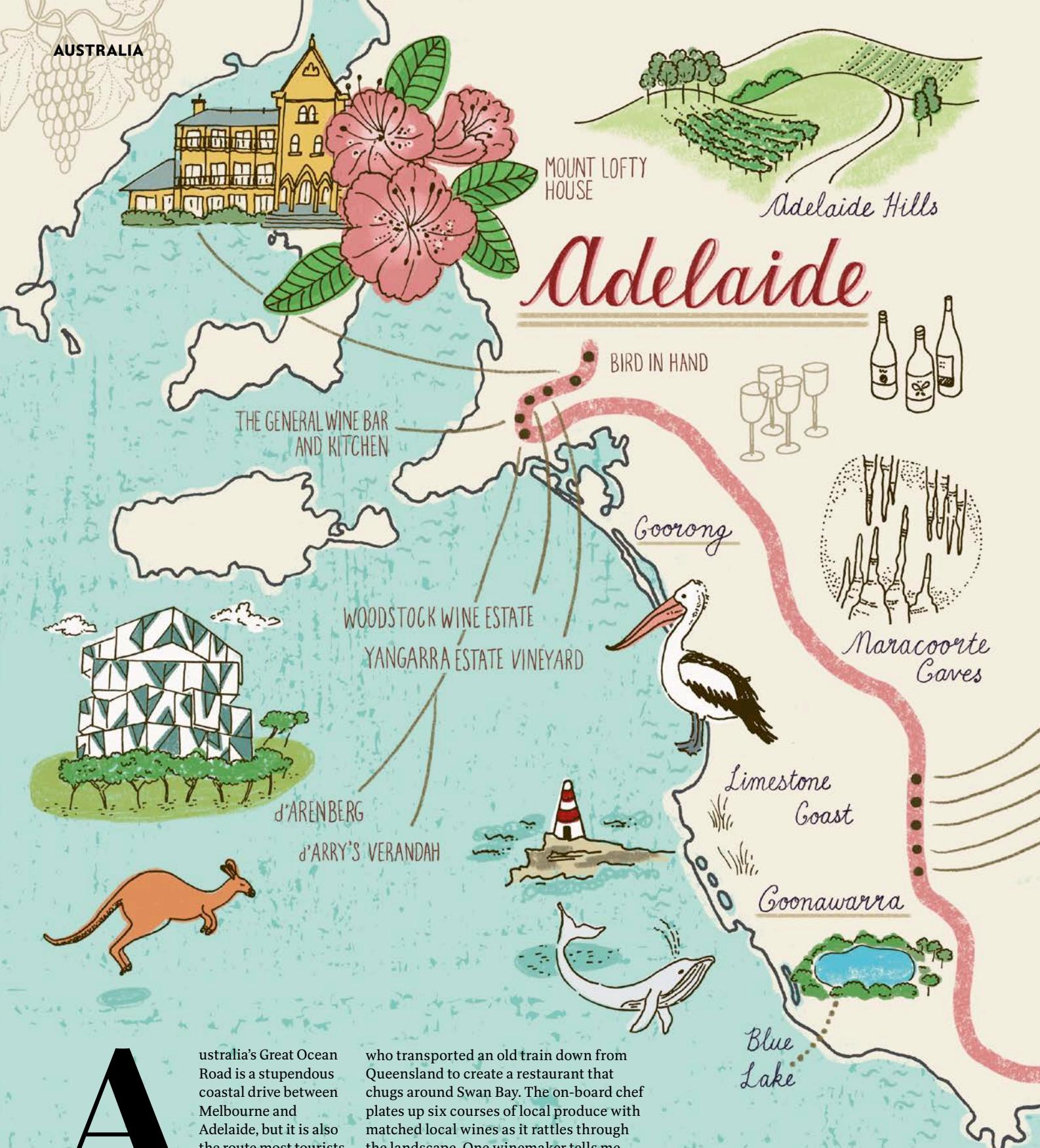
**WHEN TO GO:** December–April. SB □

# AGAINST ALL ODDS

JUST INLAND FROM THE GREAT OCEAN ROAD IS AN ALTERNATIVE ROUTE THAT WINDS THROUGH AUSTRALIA'S WINE COUNTRY. HERE, DESPITE A LACK OF NATIVE GRAPES, LOW RAINFALL, STUBBORN SOIL AND THE THREAT OF FOREST FIRES, DETERMINED PIONEERS HAVE PAVED THE WAY FOR A NEW CROP OF SPIRITED WINEMAKERS WHO ARE TAKING THE WORLD OF VITICULTURE BY STORM

WORDS **NINA CAPLAN**





**A**ustralia's Great Ocean Road is a stupendous coastal drive between Melbourne and Adelaide, but it is also the route most tourists take. Just inland is another, through wine country. Here, the land changes as you travel, becoming woodier or sandier, thrusting up bare mountains or tree-draped hills, and the wine changes with it.

The people, however, are consistently eccentric — after all, you don't build a wine industry in a gargantuan country with no native grapes and very low rainfall by taking the logical, straightforward path. As if to prove my point, I meet two locals

who transported an old train down from Queensland to create a restaurant that chugs around Swan Bay. The on-board chef plates up six courses of local produce with matched local wines as it rattles through the landscape. One winemaker tells me he treads his grapes by foot (as if making wine here weren't hard enough); another has built a giant Rubik's Cube-shaped building in his vineyard.

I eat at restaurants where they mill their own bread, or churn their own butter, or grow all their ingredients. Many people I encounter tell me they came to wine country hoping to remake their lives — as if planting themselves alongside a few vines could lead to a more fruitful existence. Or perhaps it's the restless spirit of the early settlers who



were forced to move here as convicts or as persecuted minorities, inhaled along with the menthol of eucalyptus that perfumes the air.

Below Melbourne, Port Phillip Bay curves like a pair of arms, as if the mainland had tried to hug Tasmania but missed. I take the western arm: Geelong and the Bellarine Peninsula. "You can't call this a single wine region," says Ray Nadeson, of Lethbridge Wines, half an hour north west of Geelong. "There are too many soil variations. There's limestone, basalt, granite, clay..."

We're at Mietta, a vineyard whose soil has black clay atop basalt, and which Ray considers cool-climate, despite it being T-shirt weather at the beginning of winter. Ray is a trained neuroscientist, which is pretty unusual for a winemaker, and may mean he's more precise than most. He's also the man who likes to crush grapes by foot. I don't dare point out to him that a lot of UK drinkers think of Australia as a single wine region.

There were vines here in the 1870s, Ray tells me, as he pours a selection of Chardonnays, Pinot Noirs and Shirazes in a tasting room that resembles a 19th-century parlour. They were planted by German immigrants but were all pulled up when the vine-killing phylloxera louse arrived in the Yarra Valley, north of Melbourne. I ask Ray why, given the scourge never actually made it this far south. "The British had the political power in Australia then, and the Yarra winemakers were Brits," he explains. They didn't want their suffering region to have to withstand competition from the Germans' healthy vines, so they squashed their industry as you might a louse. It took a century for replanting to begin.

Ray taught neuroscience for 25 years before opting for the precarious life of a winemaker. His wines are fantastic, as are his neighbour Nick Farr's — but don't bother trying to visit Nick; he doesn't do wine tourism. These two are helping the region to gain international acclaim — even if Ray won't admit it is a region. And they have very respectable back-up from wineries such as Scotchmans Hill and Leura Park, as well as from eccentrics like Bernard and Elizabeth Hooley, who make fairly ordinary wines at their Oakdene winery, decorated by Elizabeth with verve and a touch of craziness: teapots line the garden fence and the tasting room is cleverly clad to look like a house turned on its side.

There's a perversity to planting vines in an arid country where forest fires are more common than floods. "The soil here is from an ancient volcano," Russell Watson had told me. "When it's dry you can lose crowbars in the cracks, but it's fertile." Russell knows this because his plot has walnut, peach, quince and cherry trees; it has no vines, but there's a distillery in a shed.

Russell, a former maintenance man, plans to make whisky, but he and his wife, Lorelle, have started with gin, and turned a tin shed into a little timber-lined bar with pizzas and platters, where all those fruits and nuts end up on your plate, helping to mitigate the effects of what's in your glass. The place is called The Whiskery; nobody who's met the lavishly moustachioed Russ needs to ask why.

#### The fat of the land

So many Australian wineries have great restaurants with wide-angle views of rolling vineyards — Hollick Estates, d'Arry's Verandah, Bird in Hand Winery, to name just three. All these places feed me superbly, and I enjoy their wines all the more because of it. And that pride in what the land can produce — if you work hard enough — seeps into the conurbations, too. In southeast Australia, I have fantastic meals at Igni in Geelong, Pipers of Penola, and the Royal Mail Hotel in Dunkeld. But nowhere is quite as fantastic as Brae, a refurbished farmhouse outside the Victorian town of Birregurra, with an expansive kitchen garden and bread made from home-milled flour.

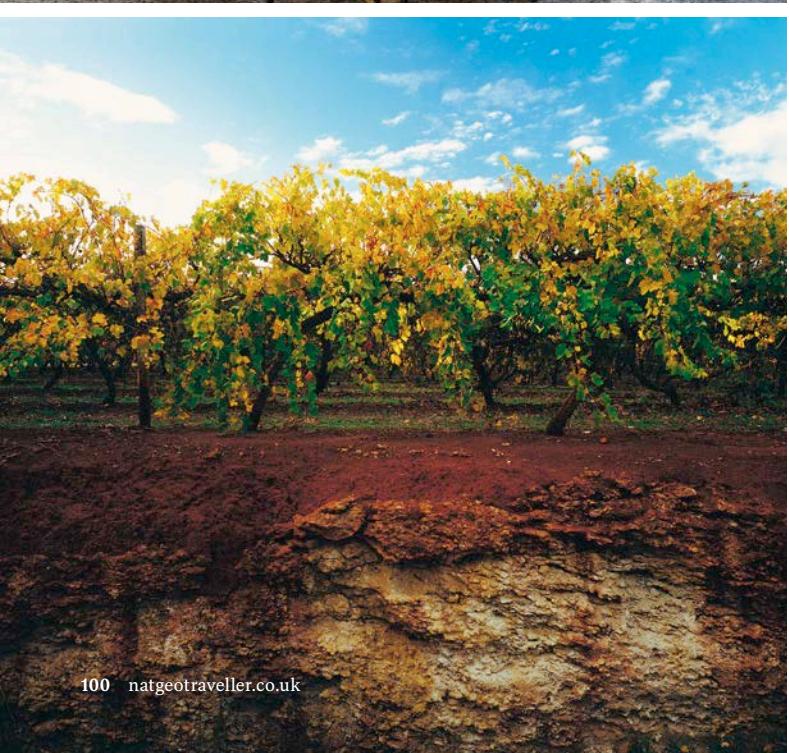
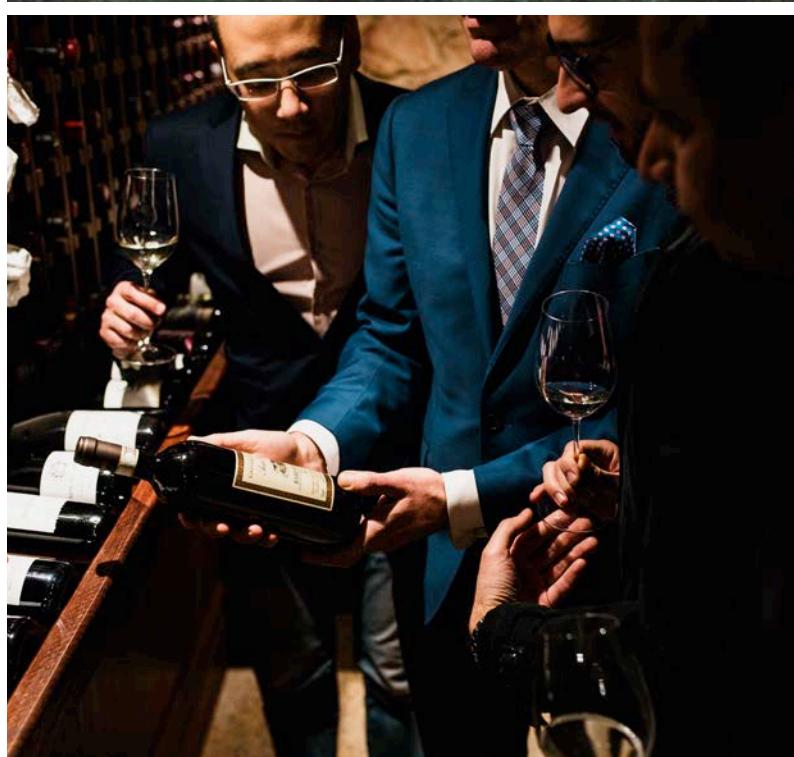
Eating well is one advantage of travelling through wine country, I reflect, as I pull into Brae, Dan Hunter's restaurant with rooms. Here, amid the silver-barked gum trees, ingredients from the garden are used to create sophisticated and witty dishes — and if you don't think lunch can be witty, you've clearly never eaten warrigal greens and herb toast with green ants, or an iced oyster lurking amid a plate of oyster-shaped rocks. Many of the wines served here are local, or local-ish — they include Crawford River Riesling and Smokestack Lightning Pinot Gris from the Yarra. I also get to try Honey & Red Gum Sour Ale, which is brewed on the premises in collaboration with Edge Brewing Projects.

A two-hour drive west, near the Grampians wine region, I stop at the Royal Mail Hotel, where Dan Hunter made his name. It's quite

**If you don't think lunch can be witty, you've clearly never eaten warrigal greens and herb toast with green ants, or an iced oyster lurking amid a plate of oyster-shaped rocks**

**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:** Colourful interior at d'Arenberg Cube restaurant; exterior of the d'Arenberg Cube; taking a seat at Geelong Cellar Door; wine menu at Geelong Cellar Door; aged duck wood-roasted on the bone, sour squash, muntries and purslane, Brae; tasting room at Provenance Wines





## It's all very rarified, or would be if the cellar weren't a corrugated shed, and the wedding venue a former wool shed that still smells of sheep

IMAGES: VISIT VICTORIA; ROYAL MAIL HOTEL, DUNKELD; SATC MILTON WORDLEY; SHANNYN HIGGINS

a challenge to create a fine-dining restaurant so far from civilisation, and so keen is owner Allan Myers to keep Hunter's replacement, Robin Wickens, happy that he's built him an elegant, standalone restaurant with a walk-through wine cellar, mountain views and Australia's largest kitchen garden.

But, of course, you're never really far from civilisation if you have a great cellar, and this one is amazing. Of Myers' 26,500 bottles — there's a cellar tour for those who like to stare at delicacies they probably can't afford — around half are French, including various vintages from Bordeaux and Burgundy. It's all very rarified, or would be if the cellar weren't a corrugated shed, and the wedding venue a former wool shed that still smells, the manager assures me gleefully, of sheep.

At dinner, I'm given Foudre Ferment Riesling from Best's Great Western: it's gorgeous. So I decide to head north to the winery, intent on taking something from this part of my trip home with me. There are rooms filled with dusty bottles, old photographs and superannuated machinery but the real museum is just outside: a vineyard full of ancient vines.

"We've got 40 varieties on that plot," Best's managing director, Ben Thomson, tells me cheerfully, "but we still don't know what all of them are." His family has owned the property since 1920 but it was the Best brothers who first made wine here, back in 1867. One day, thanks to ever-improving technology, they'll probably discover exactly what they have (is it perverse of me to view that as a shame?). Until then, they chuck the grapes into their Nursery Block red and white, and reserve sophisticated techniques for wines like my Riesling.

Best's and its neighbour, Mount Langi Ghiran, make a good contrast: the latter is bright and modern, making superb Shiraz and permitting the team's young winemakers to siphon off a bit of juice for their own experiments. This isn't common behaviour in Europe, any more than making wine from unknown grape varieties is — but then, this isn't Europe.

### Terra rossa

I cross an invisible border into South Australia, where the Limestone Coast, formed from a long-vanished sea, begins: a fantastic array of volcanoes, mountains and caves, to say nothing of the unusual soils that make such a happy home for vines.

I circle the Blue Lake, in the crater of an extinct volcano, which glows turquoise each summer but is impressively blue even on the lip of winter, and continue north to the Coonawarra wine region.

An elderly friend fondly remembers buying 'Coonawarra Claret' back when every Aussie wine was misleadingly labelled 'Claret', 'Burgundy' or 'Champagne'. There's more local confidence in the region, now. They're very proud of an iron-rich swathe of red land known as 'terra rossa', which is particularly kind to Cabernet Sauvignon.

"This is an incredible area," says Simon Meares, who started coming here on holiday and fell so hard for the region that he set up Coonawarra Experiences to run bespoke tours. He now knows everybody in the area, from Dan Redman, a fifth-generation winemaker at Redman Wines, to Steven and Emma Raidis, a young couple making excellent wine at Raidis Estate. He can plan an itinerary of wineries and restaurants, as I did, and he'll then drive while you drink. Simon is also a one-man encyclopedia of the region: when the girl behind the counter at Katnook Estate stumbles over my questions, he takes over, telling me about the old barrel room — formerly a wool shed — where John Riddoch made the region's first wines in the 1890s. John, like the Bests, had made his fortune selling sustenance to those trying their luck in the Gold Rush; that money, dug from the land as nuggets, was then planted back into it as vines.

I glamp in a field beside Bellwether Wines, which sits (along with a kitchen, dining room and tasting room made cosy with carpets and wood-burning stove) within a large, rather beautiful stone shearing shed. It was built in 1868 by Chinese immigrants, fresh off the ship, who walked all the way from the shore to the goldfields: tired men who had far better reason than me to turn their back on the coast. The tent has a proper bed, heater, and even a chaise longue, although glamping, to me, shouldn't involve an outdoor squelch to the washrooms. Still, there's a lovely dog, a grumpy donkey, and I'm woken by the mocking laughter of kookaburras.

Australia's soil shelters vine roots and, sometimes, gold, but there's other treasure beneath the country's surface. At Naracoorte Caves, the pocked, chalky earth trapped prehistoric animals and then preserved their bones. Rediscovered in the 19th century, this incredible repository of long-extinct

**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:** Mount Langi Ghiran winery, Grampians region; a herd of sheep walk through the vines at Scotchmans Hill; tasting at Arthur Hardys Cellar, Mount Lofty House; Deluxe Mountain View Room, Royal Mail Hotel; terra rossa soil, South Australia; Provenance Wines



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IMAGES: GETTY

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## Oakdene is decorated with verve and craziness: teapots line the garden fence and the tasting room is cleverly clad to look like a house turned on its side

creatures includes megafauna: gargantuan beasts (giant short-faced kangaroos, five-metre snakes, marsupial lions) that lived between 500,000 and 40,000 years ago and must have terrified the early humans.

You can descend, on guided tours, into some of the white caves, where stalactites meet stalagmites to form bars like dragons' teeth, and the reconstructed skeletons of ancient creatures loom eerily out of the darkness. You could use these caves as a wine cellar, I jest to our guide, and she takes me seriously: "No, any spill develops fungus. But we do hold an opera down here."

I surface into bright winter sunshine and, at last, swap lakes, waterfalls and extinct seas for the modern coast, taking a half-hour detour down to the town and fishing port of Robe to drive along the Coorong, an 80-mile stretch of saltwater lagoon, with the Southern Ocean hidden behind sweeping sand dunes.

### Puzzle pieces

Doug Collett was a Second World War pilot who flew over French vineyards in a Spitfire; inspired, he came home and

founded Woodstock Wine Estate. It's beautiful here, peaceful and sustainable; a gigantic fallen gum tree forms an unusual picnic table, the garden fence is made from barrel staves, and there's an enclosure where an emu watches inscrutably as kangaroos bound over to be fed. Call me an unreconstructed tourist, but these crazy creatures are a highlight of my trip. One little fellow even tries to eat my shoelaces.

Surprises take a very different shape down the road at d'Arenberg, where the startling form of a five-storey Rubik's Cube rears from a vineyard, complete with a replica of that eternally frustrating last piece, resting in the car park. The d'Arenberg Cube is the brainchild of Chester Osborn, who likens winemaking to a difficult puzzle. To say this A\$15m (£8.5m) structure is odd doesn't begin to convey the florid weirdness of a 'five senses' room covered in fake fruits and flowers, or urinals painted with enormous clown faces.

You can taste wine in a top-storey bar or learn to blend your own a couple of floors below. There are serious A\$100 bottles for sale,

ABOVE: Tasting room, Oakdene



but Chester seems determined to accentuate the bonkers side of wine. It doesn't quite work for me: we're each a different breed of contrarian. Still, there's nothing silly about the superb lunch served at the Verandah restaurant. Chester's father, d'Arry, is there, complaining about the expense of his son's project. "I'm still getting bills!" You wouldn't guess that Dad is 92, Chester 56, and the winery over 100 and one of Australian wine's biggest success stories.

The General Wine Bar & Kitchen in McLaren Flat is the Verandah's opposite in everything except quality. An unassuming town-centre restaurant jointly run by two local wineries, Mr Riggs Wine Co and Zonte's Footstep, it has no vineyard views but plenty of wines. There are exposed brick walls, leather banquets and lovingly prepared food that pairs well with a selection of their wines. It's a very Australian place — informal yet rigorous on quality. My last winery, Yangarra Estate Vineyard, is equally so. Here, the winemakers perversely insist the quality of their Grenache and Shiraz is all down to a climate similar to that of the southern Rhône, even though the 60-million-year-old sandy soil gripping the roots of vines and gum trees here has nothing in common with the stones of Châteauneuf-du-Pape. Still, the wines are really good, nourished by biodynamic practice, hot sun and, perhaps, sheer pigheadedness.

I leave the calm shade of the Vale for a glorious drive into the Adelaide Hills, my final

destination. Mount Lofty House, built in 1852 as a private home, perches on a hilltop with wonderful views down into the cool-climate foothills of this viticultural outpost just half an hour from Adelaide. There are botanical gardens next door and I like to think the exotic blooms send infinitesimal perfumed molecules into the Chardonnay vines. There's a great cellar, excavated from solid rock that's another layered fragment of Australia's past — but then, so is the wine it houses.

When I try a South Australian Riesling, I'm tasting a tradition begun in the early 19th century by German migrants who'd fled religious persecution but weren't ready to give up their native wines. As Ray Nadeson had explained, winegrowers were forced to pull up their vines around Geelong; they fared better here, and the descendants of their grapes have made Eden and Clare Valley Rieslings world-famous.

As I pull out of the Bird in Hand winery after lunch, past rose-pink galah birds pecking between the vines, it occurs to me that adversity — stubborn soils and homesick immigrants, parsimonious water rations and insanely determined pioneers — has given us the wines we drink today. I board my plane with a suitcase full of bottles: taking those wines that originated out of a longing for Europe back to fill a European glass. □

ABOVE: Cellar tour at Royal Mail Hotel

## ESSENTIALS

### Getting there & around

Etihad, Qantas, Emirates and Singapore Airlines fly between Heathrow and Melbourne/Adelaide via their respective hubs. [etihad.com](http://etihad.com) [qantas.com](http://qantas.com) [emirates.com](http://emirates.com) [singaporeair.com](http://singaporeair.com)  
A car is essential, but traffic is light and parking easy. Take a designated driver if you're tasting — the drink-driving limit is low and keenly policed. Hertz has an outlet at Melbourne airport; the car can be returned in Adelaide. [hertz.com.au](http://hertz.com.au)

### When to go

The temperatures hover around 20C in September–November, when the vines are budding, and March–April, as harvest approaches. These areas get very hot in summer (December–February) and some, like Coonawarra, can be cold and rainy in midwinter (July–August).

### Where to stay

The Nest. [thenest.net.au](http://thenest.net.au)  
Brae. [braerestaurant.com](http://braerestaurant.com)  
Royal Mail Hotel. [royalmail.com.au](http://royalmail.com.au)  
Bell Tents, Bellwether Winery. [bellwetherwines.com.au](http://bellwetherwines.com.au)  
The Farm Willunga. [thefarmwillunga.com.au](http://thefarmwillunga.com.au)  
Mount Lofty House. [mtloftyhouse.com.au](http://mtloftyhouse.com.au)

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Hollick Winery and Restaurant. [hollick.com](http://hollick.com)  
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Lethbridge Wines. [lethbridgewines.com](http://lethbridgewines.com)  
Scotchmans Hill. [scotchmans.com.au](http://scotchmans.com.au)  
Katnook Estate. [katnookestate.com.au](http://katnookestate.com.au)  
Redman Winery. [redman.com.au](http://redman.com.au)  
Raidis Estate. [raidis.com.au](http://raidis.com.au)  
Woodstock Wines Estate. [woodstockwine.com.au](http://woodstockwine.com.au)  
Yangarra Estate Vineyard. [yangarra.com](http://yangarra.com)  
Naracoorte Cave World Heritage Fossil Site. [naracoortecaves.sa.gov.au](http://naracoortecaves.sa.gov.au)

### How to do it

**COONAWARRA EXPERIENCES** offers a day tasting, a trip to Naracoorte Caves, two nights in a luxury bell tent and the A Table of Twelve wine-matching experience at Bellwether from A\$599 (£334) per person, based on two. [coonawarraexperiences.com.au](http://coonawarraexperiences.com.au)  
**TRAVELBAG** offers three nights in Adelaide and three in Melbourne from £1,299 per person, based on two sharing. Includes car hire and economy flights (London to Adelaide; Melbourne to London). [travelbag.co.uk](http://travelbag.co.uk)



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CLOSER TO THE HEART

**COULD YOU  
CROSS THE  
ANTARCTIC  
CIRCLE?**



Brave the journey south to this frozen wilderness and you'll find unclimbed peaks, place names like Exasperation Inlet and Danger Islands, and a British surveying base abandoned due to encroaching ice — all stark reminders that the Great White Continent is hostile to humans. But the hardships are worth enduring for the spectacular landscapes and wildlife

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHS **NIGEL TISDALL**



ON THE BLEAK AND CHILLY SHORES OF CUVERVILLE ISLAND, BLEACHED WHALEBONES LIE STREWN ACROSS THE ROCKS LIKE A SMASHED ONION. IT'S HERE THAT AROUND 7,000 PAIRS OF GENTOO PENGUINS — THE LARGEST ROOKERY IN THE ANTARCTIC PENINSULA — ARE DEMONSTRATING HOW THE SPECIES HAS MANAGED TO SURVIVE IN THIS SUBZERO WILDERNESS FOR THE PAST 40 MILLION YEARS.

**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP**

**LEFT:** Gentoo penguin; the expedition ship, *Akademik Sergey Vavilov*; ruined whaling boat, Mikkelsen Harbor; rigid-inflatable boat excursion

**PREVIOUS PAGES:** Close encounter with an iceberg near Pléneau Island

I can be certain about these numbers because among the 92 passengers aboard the *Akademik Sergey Vavilov* — a Russian expedition ship that's been making voyages through the steely waters of Antarctica for over 20 years — is official penguin counter Grant Humphries. A jovial Newfoundland who works for the nonprofit conservation group Oceanites, he must have tougher nostrils than me, because the stench of this vast, orange-billed congregation is nauseating. Yes, I agree that these 'old men, full of their own importance and late for dinner' — as polar explorer Apsley Cherry-Garrard put it — are supremely watchable. There's that comic waddle, the long commuter-like lines as they tramp determinedly through the snow, and the dazzling aquarobics once in the sea.

But now I'm here, standing right beside them, it's abundantly clear this is no paradise. There are fearsome blizzards to tough out, and the constant threat of attendant south polar skuas, which mercilessly swoop down from on high to demolish the penguins' carefully nursed eggs whenever they feel peckish. It's a miserable scene to witness — the gentoos futilely squawking their disapproval while the predator takes a murderous nibble, then abandons the rest. "Most penguins will lay two eggs," explains our expert ornithologist, Steve Bailey, who seems inured to such trauma. I feel better after hearing that, especially when he adds that it's late in the season so the eggs are most likely infertile anyway.

That evening, in the *Vavilov*'s panoramic top-deck bar, I sip a The Thrill of the Krill (gin with Campari) as Grant tells me his gentoo tally doesn't include non-breeding pairs and chicks. His scientific rigour appeals to my enthusiastic shipmates, who mainly hail from America, Canada, Australia and the UK.

No one travels to Antarctica idly — a trip here is a costly, once-in-a-lifetime adventure, and this sense of purpose instils a commendable camaraderie. Aided by the 22-strong team of guides, naturalists, photography experts and a staff largely drawn from the Pacific Northwest — we eagerly share wildlife sightings, help one another to master the complexity of digital cameras, and lend a hand as we struggle into our polar-grade outdoor gear and life jackets.

Unlike most voyages that set off from the southern tip of South America every austral summer to sail around the islands and bays fringing the west coast of the Antarctic Peninsula, our journey has a specific goal.





FROM TOP: Glacier-viewing in Paradise Harbor; sparring fur seals  
RIGHT: One Ocean Expeditions guide



IT'S DEFINITELY NOT A CRUISE. "WE DON'T LIKE THE 'C' WORD," QUIPS ASSISTANT EXPEDITION LEADER CODY BURWELL AS HE OUTLINES A PROPOSED ITINERARY THAT SEEMS TO FALL APART ALMOST AS SOON AS HE UTTERS IT

We've chosen to venture further south than others in an attempt to cross the Antarctic Circle, the most southerly of the five major circles of latitude. Make it to this seriously remote destination, and you really have accomplished something rare and wonderful.

Reaching this snowy grail is by no means a given, which is why One Ocean Expeditions, the organiser of my 11-day odyssey departing from Port Stanley in the Falkland Islands, bills this as a 'quest'. And it's definitely not a cruise. "We don't like the 'C' word," quips assistant expedition leader Cody Burwell as he outlines a proposed itinerary that seems to fall apart almost as soon as he utters it.

Our initial plan, after two days sailing south, is to make our first sighting of the continent at Elephant Island, the desolate isle in the South Shetlands archipelago, where, in 1916, polar hero Ernest Shackleton and his men sought refuge following the loss of their ship *Endurance*. I study the maritime charts up on the bridge, and notice the place names that have been slapped onto this harsh world; it's clear that those before us had much worse to contend with. Exasperation Inlet, Danger Islands, Cape Disappointment — there's even the rather brilliant Punta Shiver.

Instead, we first behold the Great White Continent at Turret Point on King George Island, the largest of the South Shetland Islands — a fitting place to start as 2019 marks the bicentenary of the accidental discovery of the archipelago in February 1819 by Englishman William Smith. He was the captain of *The Williams*, a cargo-laden brig that had been blown off course while trying to round Cape Horn. Although unable to land, Smith returned that October to step ashore, raise three cheers for King George III and proudly plant the Union Jack.

Most historians consider this to be man's first proper encounter with Antarctica, although the momentousness of the event took a while to sink in. 'A new land has been discovered,' the *New-York Mercantile Advertiser* reported tersely, adding that 'the Captain landed, found it covered with snow, [with] an abundance of seals and whales — no inhabitants.'

No surprises there, then — my fellow travellers and I have been gazing into the glassy crevices of luminous blue glaciers and admiring colossal mountain peaks that have never felt the tread of a human's boot; their snowy flanks strangely splashed with a pink algae that suggests there's been some dreadful massacre. But as we now follow in Smith's wake, nosing about the snowy wilds in a warm, ice-strengthened ship kitted out with a sauna, masseuse and excellent chocolate brownies, I still feel like an explorer.

Each day brings fresh revelations — it could be the vast and humbling size of an iceberg, or the distant thunder from an unseen avalanche. Up in the ship's well-stocked library I read that the Macaroni penguin is so named because its golden crest reminded sailors of the dyed hair of 18th-century dandies newly returned from their Grand Tour of Italy. Down in the presentation room, there's an illuminating lecture on the penchants of pinnipeds — who would've guessed that crabeater seals don't eat crabs?

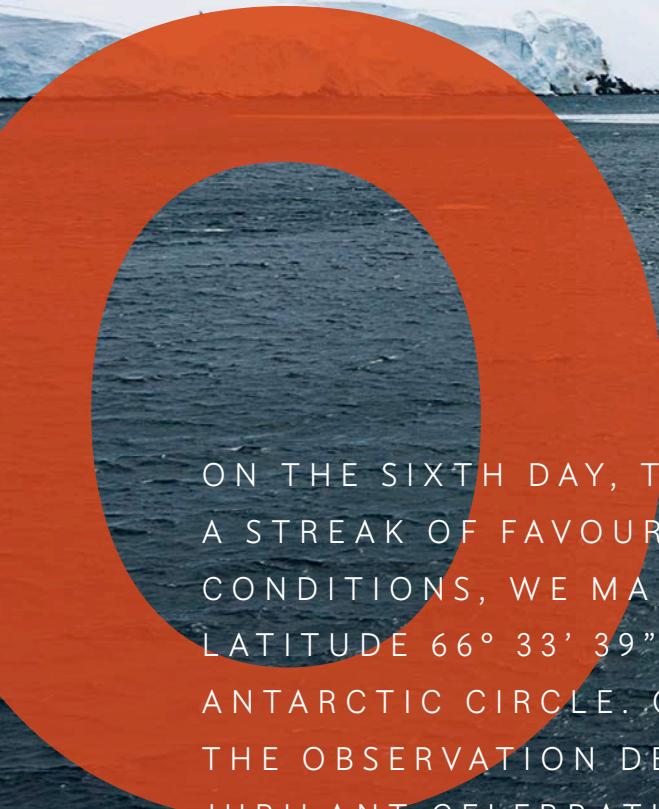


If my shipmates and I have a common interest it's the wildlife of Antarctica, which, thankfully, survived the spate of hunting that followed Smith's discovery. The clarity of the dry, dustless air this far south is extraordinary, and our sightings are assiduously recorded on a chart that fills up fast: 600 Antarctic prions (a seabird), 100 southern elephant seals, a lone fin whale... In nature's frozen church, penguins line up together as if posing for a school photograph and seals float around on ice floes without a care in their pristine world.

#### A LINE IN THE SNOW

"So what's left on your Antarctic wish list?" I ask Steve Bailey, who's worked on over 50 such voyages and done sufficient travelling to tick off 7,949 of the world's 10,514 bird species. "Spectacled porpoises and a Type D orca," he replies instantly. Apparently there's only been a handful of sightings of the latter.

I'm happy enough that we spy humpback whales for seven consecutive days, including a close encounter where everyone shrieks with delight as a pair slip through the waves with a balletic grace that seems quite ridiculous for a mammal that's as long as a bus and weighs up to 47 tonnes. On another day we sight around 60 of them, which perhaps explains why, when another is spotted during dinner, only a few passengers get up to admire it.



ON THE SIXTH DAY, THANKS TO A STREAK OF FAVOURABLE CONDITIONS, WE MAKE IT TO LATITUDE 66° 33' 39" — THE ANTARCTIC CIRCLE. OUT ON THE OBSERVATION DECK, JUBILANT CELEBRATIONS ARE HELD AGAINST A BACKDROP OF SUNLIT ICEBERGS AND SNOW-DUSTED LIFEBOATS

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EXPEDITIONS

DETAILLE ISLAND IS WHERE A BRITISH SURVEYING BASE WAS ABANDONED, LEAVING BEHIND A CLUTCH OF LONELY WOODEN HUTS THAT HAVE REMAINED FROZEN IN TIME

On the sixth day, thanks to a streak of favourable conditions, we make it to latitude 66° 33' 39" — the Antarctic Circle. Out on the observation deck, jubilant celebrations are held against a backdrop of sunlit icebergs and snow-dusted lifeboats. Jamie Sharp, our kayaking leader, plays a mellow tune on his guitar, and Katie Murray, our historian, reads out accounts of how earlier explorers chose to acknowledge this famous line in the snow. Captain James Cook was typically understated with a diary entry, Roald Amundsen went wild with an extra cup of coffee, while French naval officer Dumont D'Urville donned full fancy dress.

There's a further reward for getting so far south — Detaille Island. This is where a British surveying base was set up in 1956, then abandoned three years later, leaving behind a clutch of lonely wooden huts that have remained frozen in time, their period interiors now cared for by the UK Antarctic Heritage Trust. "You're all very, very lucky," our guide, Kaylan Worsnop, reflects as we tramp through the wilds to what would surely crown any list of the world's 100 greatest sheds.

"I've made it to Detaille four times," she explains, "and this is the first one where the conditions have been favourable enough for us to get inside." Carefully brushing the snow off our boots, we suddenly step back into a world of Lifebuoy soap and bakelite radios, where a young Joan Collins graces the cover of *Weekend* magazine with cigarette in hand, and the after-dinner entertainment is Tennyson's poems or a round of Scrabble on the homemade board.

Even more remote communities await as we wend our way north. In the Argentine Islands, Academician Vernadsky Station is home to a dozen Ukrainian scientists and 3,000 gentoo penguins. Inside its well-heated wooden cabins is a small souvenir shop and a post office (letters sent from here do arrive, eventually), along with the world's southernmost bar, whose shots of vodka-based moonshine make a splendid 10am stiffener.

The next day, in Paradise Harbor, we step ashore at Brown Station, an Argentine

**FROM TOP:** Wooden hut on Detaille Island; passengers capturing the moment on a rigid-inflatable boat cruise





base ostentatiously painted in its national colours. It's our first opportunity to set foot on the Antarctic mainland, where we eagerly climb up to the summit of a hill covered in deep snow, then slide back down on our bums like mischievous schoolkids. This central section of the Antarctic Peninsula is also home to one of its star sights, the Lemaire Channel — a narrow strait bordered by steep, snow-clad mountains. It takes us an hour to sail through at a speed of eight knots, a regal journey during which we're blessed with vistas so dramatic it would've been appropriate to blast Wagner's *The Ride of the Valkyries* over the public address system.

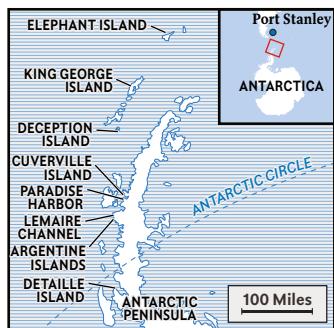
Leonid Sazonov, our highly experienced captain — and Lenin lookalike — from Kaliningrad, stands in silent command as we glide past sugary peaks. There's a further test of his skills two days later when we're invited to the bridge at 6am to witness him guide us through a 755ft-wide channel known as Neptune's Bellows. This marks the entrance to Deception Island, a C-shaped volcanic island in the South Shetlands. The mighty, rusting ruins of a whaling station litter its black sands while steaming, thermal waters are just about warm enough for a bracing dip.

"I knew this would be a good adventure," a fellow traveller reflects, "but not this good." We all agree we're glad to have not chosen a larger ship (those with over 500 passengers can't make landings), or a more luxurious one, where gourmet dinners and turn-down fripperies would seem out of place in such an elemental world. As we return to King George Island at the close of our epic, 1,600-nautical-mile voyage, the weather seems sad to see us go. Flecks of snow dance around the decks and thick grey cloud clamps down on the barren hills like a heavy saucepan lid.

There's a collective groan as we all simultaneously receive a text message welcoming us, variously, to China, Uruguay, Chile — which, we presume, has something to do with the many international scientific stations here. It's been a phenomenal privilege to visit a continent that just two centuries ago was undiscovered, and to behold its Edenic wildlife and majestic landscapes. As Shackleton put it, "We all have our own White South." And now I've found mine. □

**ABOVE:** Taking the plunge at Deception Island

## ESSENTIALS



### Getting there & around

Expedition cruises to the Antarctica Peninsula sail from the ports of Punta Arenas in Chile, Ushuaia in Argentina and Port Stanley in the Falkland Islands. LATAM flies from Heathrow to Punta Arenas and Port Stanley via Santiago, and to Ushuaia via Buenos Aires. Flight time: 21h.

Itineraries often combine a two-day sail south from the tip of South America or the Falkland Islands to the South Shetlands with a charter flight back from the largest of the latter, King George Island. All ships vary their routes and excursions within the Antarctica Peninsula according to the prevailing weather, sea and ice conditions. Trips ashore are by rigid-inflatable boats with full wet-weather gear provided.

### When to go

The season runs from late October to late March, with voyages aiming to cross the Antarctic Circle sailing in January and February, where temperatures average from 0C to -34C.

### More info

International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators. [iaato.org](http://iaato.org)  
UK Antarctic Heritage Trust. [ukaht.org](http://ukaht.org)  
Lonely Planet Antarctica. RRP: £18.99.  
Forgotten Footprints: Lost Stories in the Discovery of Antarctica, by John Harrison. RRP: £20 (Parthian Books)

### How to do it

ONE OCEAN EXPEDITIONS offers 10- to 21-night voyages to the Antarctica Peninsula, departing from Ushuaia, Punta Arenas and Port Stanley, from \$8,895 (£6,780) per person excluding international flights. This is based on a triple share cabin and includes all meals, lectures, excursions and expedition gear. [oneoceaneexpeditions.com](http://oneoceaneexpeditions.com)



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# SWITZERLAND

Easy city living, spectacular backdrops and an outdoor lifestyle — welcome to Lucerne, Switzerland's vibrant lakeside city that ticks along to a gentle rhythm at the foothills of Mount Pilatus

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHS **LOLA AKINMADE ÅKERSTRÖM**







### LIFE BESIDE THE LAKE

From lakeside festivals to boat trips up and down Lake Lucerne with Mount Pilatus looming in the distance, life in Lucerne revolves around the water. Mornings see locals jogging past swans and sailboats, or pacing the promenades as they browse Saturday markets for fresh produce or antiques.





### MOUNTAIN HIGH

A mere 15-minute car drive from Lucerne takes you to the town of Kriens to start your summit of Mount Pilatus and its iconic peak, Tomlishorn, which stands at 6,982ft. Mount Pilatus has the steepest cogwheel railway in the world — the Pilatus Railway. The railway, which was commissioned in 1889, has a maximum gradient of 48% and makes the journey in roughly 30 minutes.



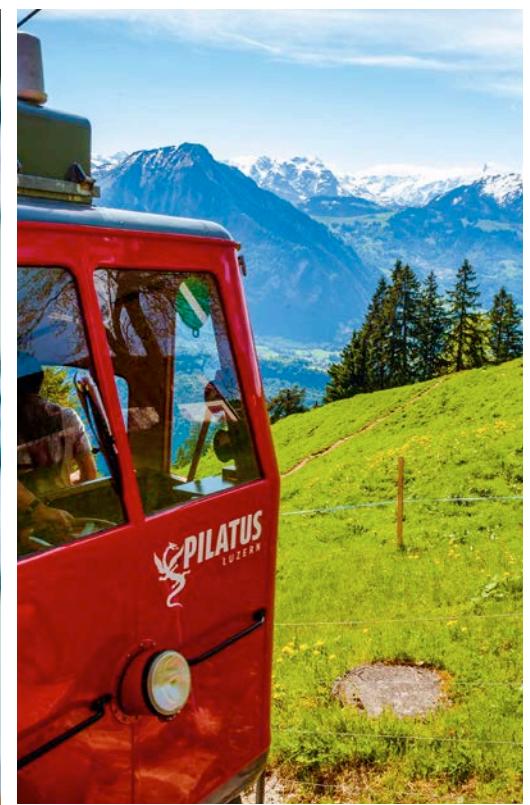






## HEAD FOR HEIGHTS

Scaling Pilatus first requires a panoramic gondola ride that slowly takes you from Kriens over lush fir forests before swapping to an aerial cable-car. From there, it's panoramic views over mountains, pea-green meadows and wooden cabins. If you've got the energy, join the locals for a run back down the mountain.





## VIEW TO A KILL

Looking more like a Bond villain's lair than anything else, Hotel Bellevue sits atop Mount Pilatus, offering captivating 360-degree panoramas of this pocket of the Alps. Far below, spread out like an indigo carpet, is Lake Lucerne, tucked between the mountains — all the more spectacular from this lofty alpine idyll. □



# ADVENTURE AWAITS IN BANFF AND LAKE LOUISE

A PLACE WHERE WILDLIFE OUTNUMBERS PEOPLE, GLACIERS SUPPLY DISTILLERIES, UNTOUCHED POWDER IS NEVER FAR, AND ENDLESS YEAR-ROUND ADVENTURE ABOUNDS



The three world-class ski resorts in Banff and Lake Louise are made up of Banff Sunshine, Mt Norquay, and the Lake Louise Ski Resort. Though each is unique in terms of dining, terrain and Rocky Mountain views, they can all be accessed by one lift ticket and paired with accommodation packages through SkiBig3. Out here though, a ski holiday isn't just about skiing — it's snowshoeing adventures with Great Divide Nature Interpretation, introductory ice climbing at Johnston Canyon, skating on Lake Louise, nightlife in downtown Banff, soaking in the Banff Upper Hot Springs, dog sledding on historic trails, and scenic drives on the Icefields Parkway. After a day of adventure,

finish it off with drinks made with glacial-sourced spirits from Banff's Park Distillery and craft beers from Banff Ave Brewing Co.

There are even more opportunities for adventure as winter turns to spring: ski by morning and hike or bike in the afternoon. Take in a concert at one of the area's ski resorts, dine at the top of Sulphur Mountain, enjoy a chef-inspired meal in a fairy-tale castle or visit a picturesque wooden cabin in the back country. Explore a trip to Banff and Lake Louise and live your own adventure.



[banfflakelouise.com](http://banfflakelouise.com)

# THE RULES OF THE RAINFOREST

In Borneo's Batang Ai National Park, the Iban tribe share their ancestral knowledge of the 140-million-year-old rainforest they call home — and help to track down its most famous inhabitant: the orangutan

WORDS CHARLOTTE WIGRAM-EVANS





**I** have ants in my pants. Fire ants to be precise.

"OWWWWEEEEE," I scream, leaping off the rotting log I'd been resting on and sprinting to a nearby stream. A burning pain is coursing through my thighs, flames are creeping up my backside, and all I can think to do is submerge myself in water; to put out the fire these tiny, insignificant-looking bugs have ignited.

After wallowing — literally and mentally — in the shallows for a few minutes, I rejoin my group: my grinning guide, Kajan, and three members of the Iban tribe. I'd arrived the evening before, the clamour of Kuching (the capital of the Malaysian state of Sarawak) left far behind me. It was the final night of their annual Gawai Dayak (harvest) festival and they'd each consumed enough rice wine to irrigate a small field. Today though, we've left their longhouse home behind and plunged into the jungle, and despite what must be monstrous hangovers, they're faring much better than me.

The Iban tribe have eked out their existence in the backwoods of Batang Ai for centuries, their symbiotic relationship with the natural world one of respect and understanding. It's that world I'm seeking an insight to — and into these people who call the jungle home.

Once, all of Borneo was a vast 140-million-year-old rainforest, but while the modern world eats away at Mother Nature, Batang Ai remains one of her strongholds. Around 150 miles southeast of the Kuching, this protected, 10sq mile park is one of only two places still home to the Iban.

We walk on. Leaves the size of four-year-old children float slowly down from the furling canopy, the enormous wings of a swallowtail butterfly sound like the drone of a small plane, and bullet ants an inch long scuttle purposefully across our path. This is nature on steroids.

The butterflies' hum is joined by the gecko's witchy cackle, the shrill, boiling-kettle whistle of the cicada and tweets, chirrups and coos of other heard-but-not-seen birds. Together, they form a deafening crescendo of all that's fiercely, potently alive.

Muntai, wiry, sharp-elbowed and with a wonderfully solemn face, leads us out into a stream. His knowledge of the forest is unparalleled, I'm told, and he strides ahead, sure-footed as a mountain goat while I stumble in his wake. Behind me, Kajan roars with laughter, "You look drunk, Charlotte!"

From the river, the jungle seems impenetrable. Vine-like lianas trail their long limbs in the water while kingfishers flit from tree to tree, flashes of blue among an endless wall of green. At points, the canopy closes above our heads and we splash along in semi-darkness before emerging suddenly into blinding sunlight.

"How do you know so much about the forest?" I ask Muntai, finally catching up with the group. Dali, the youngest and quietest, with dark soulful eyes, has stopped to retrieve his fishing rod from his backpack, whipping it into the water with a deft flick of the wrist. From then on it's an almost permanent fixture in his hand, a bag of rasbora fish hanging from his belt.



"I eat everything," he replies casually, "I've been poisoned many times, but I learn." "He's almost died three times!" pipes up Rantau, the eldest member of the group with twinkly eyes and a constant smile. Mundai simply shrugs. "Now I know every plant, every tree. I love being in the forest — you see so much, experience so much."

An hour later at our makeshift camp, I see what Mundai means — a leech the length of my finger has managed to slime its way up my top. As I go to pull it off, it performs an incredible feat of acrobatics, flipping over to sucker onto my stomach further down. We play this bizarre game of slinky until a mild panic on how low it's getting gives me extra strength and I yank it off once and for all.

Watching blood run in crimson rivulets down my stomach, I find myself simultaneously repulsed and elated. This is no mere taster course — I've dived headfirst into the very depths of Borneo's jungle.

#### In search of the red ape

That afternoon, as we sit around the roughly hewn camp table sipping cups of tea, Mundai seems determined to give me a real taste of the rainforest. Having disappeared into the trees moments before, he now returns cradling an astonishing selection of plant life. "Like this," he gestures, folding up a leaf and popping it whole into his mouth.



"I EAT  
EVERYTHING,  
I'VE BEEN  
POISONED MANY  
TIMES, BUT  
I LEARN"

We munch our way through a pale green osabi plant, a tough galangal leaf, and some wild guava Mundai obtains by shimmying about 160ft up the poker-straight trunk of a jambu tree. By the time this impromptu afternoon tea is over, the light has faded and the guys jump to their feet. Frogging time.

If I looked drunk in daylight, I'm two bottles of wine down when we head back out into the water. With only my budget torch to guide me, I career from one side of the stream to the other, at one point finding myself on my bum, baffled as to how I got there. Overhead, fireflies buzz lazily past, their flashes seeming like half-hearted distress signals.

Our efforts are rewarded, however. Kajan points out a dwarf litter frog no bigger than a kidney bean, a mating pair of luminous white-lipped tree frogs, and the knobby spine of a slender toad. The guys, meanwhile have caught 20 giant river frogs.

"Not bad," Rantau acknowledges, "although when I was young and fit I could catch more than 100 in one night." The slimy croakers become a midnight feast back at camp, stewed with copious amounts of lemongrass, ginger and chilli, and washed down with a mug of rice wine that we down in one — a tradition, I'm assured.

It's peaceful, sleepy scenes like this that must keep the Iban from seeking out a city living I wonder out loud, as we lie on our



backs and stare at the stars, every frog bone sucked clean. "Nah, it's the women," Dali scoffs, before Muntai turns to me seriously: "I love the orangutans. They make me happy, as if my ancestors are watching over me."

That the spirits of loved ones live on in the animals of the rainforest is a long-held Iban belief, and despite many converting to Christianity, it's one that's remained. Orangutans are sacred here. And so the next day, we leave Dali and Rantau to their fishing and set out in search of the red ape.

Often the terrain is so steep it's all-four-limbs kind of work. At one point I slide quite spectacularly down a mud bank, my fingers scrabbling frantically for purchase until a vine comes to my rescue. Muntai, however, seems so completely in control that I have to ask: "Do you obey the forest, or does the forest obey you?" There's no hesitation, "The forest is boss, but I follow its rules. If you respect the forest, then the forest respects you." "So no bad experiences?" "None. It's my home; I'm completely safe here."

I decide against questioning whether being poisoned three times wouldn't class as 'bad'; he's found a yellow-rimmed nest of tiny stingless bees and is clearly engrossed.

The trek takes us about 1,000ft above sea level, where views stretch out across a blanket of forest. The trees seem so infinite it's hard to imagine this reserve is just one

tiny, protected portion of what was once 287,000sq miles of jungle. We then plunge back into darkness and down to stream level, where lesser bamboo bats dive and swoop back into their mud bank caves.

And then, just as I was becoming complacent, Muntai pauses, scanning the treetops in fraught anticipation. We freeze. Watching, waiting. Suddenly, an orangutan swings into view, his hairy body as supple as plasticine, his face almost human. He's as fascinated by us as we are in him. Or so I think.

"Run!" Kajan yells, and we sprint upstream as a branch as long as my leg is hurled from the canopy. Romantic notions of my bonding with a wild orangutan well and truly banished, I look up again. He's hanging upside down now, staring at us — beside himself with fury.

"He's defending his territory," Kajan explains. "Wait, he'll aim better next time." And the next branch smacks the water not five feet from where we're standing. After 20 minutes of relentless bombardment, we're subjected to one last punishing stare before he swings off, leaving us surrounded by the carnage of his jungle warfare. We pause to reflect: "That strength!" "Those acrobatics!"

But maybe it's Muntai's influence — or perhaps the pants — I'm itching to get going. I want to see more; experience more. And so, like the fire ants, we march on, the jungle swallowing us up once more. □

**PREVIOUS PAGE:** Macaque in Batang Ai National Park; rattan palms

**FROM LEFT:** Members of the Iban tribe on their longboat; wild guava; Muntai at the jungle camp; juvenile orangutan

## ESSENTIALS

### Getting there & around

Malaysia Airlines flies from Heathrow to Kuala Lumpur and then on to Kuching. [malaysiaairlines.com](http://malaysiaairlines.com)  
Average flight time: 16h

### When to go

April to September are drier with temperatures around 27-30C, though showers can occur at any time and humidity can reach 90%.

### How to do it

Borneo Adventure offers trips to Batang Ai to visit the Iban tribe at Nanga Sumpa Lodge and explore the surrounding jungle. Stays include all meals and start from £250 per person. [borneoadventure.com](http://borneoadventure.com)

Produced in association with Sarawak Tourism. [sarawaktourism.com](http://sarawaktourism.com)

# City life TOKYO



*Delving into the suburbs on a mission to eat with the locals reveals a way of life a world away from the neon-splashed chaos at the hypermodern heart of the metropolis*

**WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHS:** Pól Ó Conghaile

**“Y**ou always bump into someone you know here,” Daniela Baggio Morano exclaims, waving to a passer-by. She’s walking me from Kōenji train station into a kaleidoscopic flurry of vintage clothes shops, secret vinyl stores and lantern-lit laneways wafting with smells from early evening *izakayas* (pubs).

It’s Saturday afternoon, daylight is dipping and neon signs are sparking to life, cooking up a weird, electro-sunset that makes everyone look like the cocktail party version of themselves. Passing beneath a bridge, we pause to watch a young band of buskers bash out their take on W B Yeats’ poem Down by the Salley Gardens. A JR Line train thunders overhead. And Daniela keeps spotting people she knows. It’s the last thing I expected in Tokyo — a sprawling super-city that’s home to 37 million souls.

“Kōenji is really alive,” Daniela chirps, whisking me from the candy-coloured rails of a *kawaii* clothing (cutesy, Lolita-esque) store to a shoebox-sized Okinawan restaurant for snacks. A guide with personalised tour company CityUnscripted, she’s half-Japanese, half-Italian and 100% Kōenji — a natural ambassador besotted with this hip suburban hood since moving here several years ago.

High-rise Roppongi (the entertainment district), it ain’t. Right up until the 1920s, Kōenji was a quilt of rice paddies. Communities began to sprout here after the Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923, but it avoided the Second World War bombings that levelled much of Tokyo, and so retains its low-rise, lived-in, *shitamachi* (old town) feel. Kōenji has a bit of grit, too — it was the birthplace of Japanese punk in the 1970s, and even today, you’ll struggle to find a single Starbucks. Wearing black jeans, T-shirt and Docs, Daniela fits right in.

“There’s no distance between people here,” laughs 75-year-old Kamura Chigusa, another local, who serves us plates of crispy *katsu* (panko-coated cutlets) and mountains of cabbage at Gourmet House Baratei. She and her husband — who hides away in the kitchen, reading the paper and dodging my camera — “embody Kōenji soul”, Daniela says, before Kamura swallows her up in a big hug. It’s the only one I witness over a week in this famously reserved country.

“Just because you’re old doesn’t mean you can’t be young,” Daniela says, emerging from the embrace. And Kamura certainly plays the part — she wears fake yellow roses in her purple hair and the walls of her restaurant









*I had my Bill Murray moments, too. I got stuck in a cat cafe, trying to back out of a tiny room full of vending machines without tripping over a rare breed of kitty*

are a scrapbook of her life — pinned with everything from tiny dolls to newspaper stories on sumo wrestlers.

#### LOST IN TRANSLATION

I knew there'd be surprises in Tokyo. "Get ready to see the future," a colleague told me before I left. A few days later, I surfaced from Tokyo Station to a scene of teeming rain, salarymen swarming under skyscrapers, and thunder pealing over the Imperial Palace East Gardens.

I had my Bill Murray moments, too. I got stuck in a cat cafe, trying to back out of a tiny room full of vending machines without tripping over a rare breed of kitty. I marvelled at tourists in superhero suits taking selfies on go-kart tours, and contrasted the souped-up, neon-splattered cityscapes of Shinjuku and Ginza with the manicured city parks and polite-but-firm signs requesting commuters not to talk on their phones on the subway.

Veering between Japan's ancient cultural concept of *wa* ('harmony') and its mind-blowing, hypermodern virtual-reality show is a rite of passage — as a multitude of international visitors will discover during the 2019 Rugby World Cup and 2020 Summer Olympics. It's like playing an Xbox version of a city break.

But too many people leave Tokyo still 'Lost in Translation' — I want a sense of its

neighbourhoods, and the people that call them home. One way to do that is to join them for as many meals as possible.

"The quietness comes from traditional Japan; the chaos from now," Kaede Ose tells me. I've met up with Kaede and her mother, Yuko — a culinary expert and author of recipe books on everything from bento boxes to fermented miso — for a shopping trip in another of Tokyo's off-radar neighbourhood, Yanesen.

We're soon off on a *shitamachi* safari, learning about sake, scoffing crunchy *mentchi katsu* (a deep-fried, breaded meat patty) and rummaging through food stores for *myoga* ginger and sticky *manju* (steamed cakes filled with bean paste). Not long into the journey, Yuko stops to swap her heels for a comfier pair of *tabi* (split-toe) shoes she's carrying in her handbag.

"My own mother was very good at cooking and I loved it," she tells me. "My favourite was a rice ball, *onigiri*, with cod roe. She made it by hand and it was particularly tender due to the force of her hands. You know, a good sushi restaurant is not just about the fish. It's about how the sushi chef handles the rice."

Later, time-honoured skills like this come to life beautifully over a traditional, multi-course *keiseki* lunch at Wadakura, the Palace Hotel Tokyo's Japanese fine dining restaurant, in Chiyoda. An indoor waterfall

神田明神

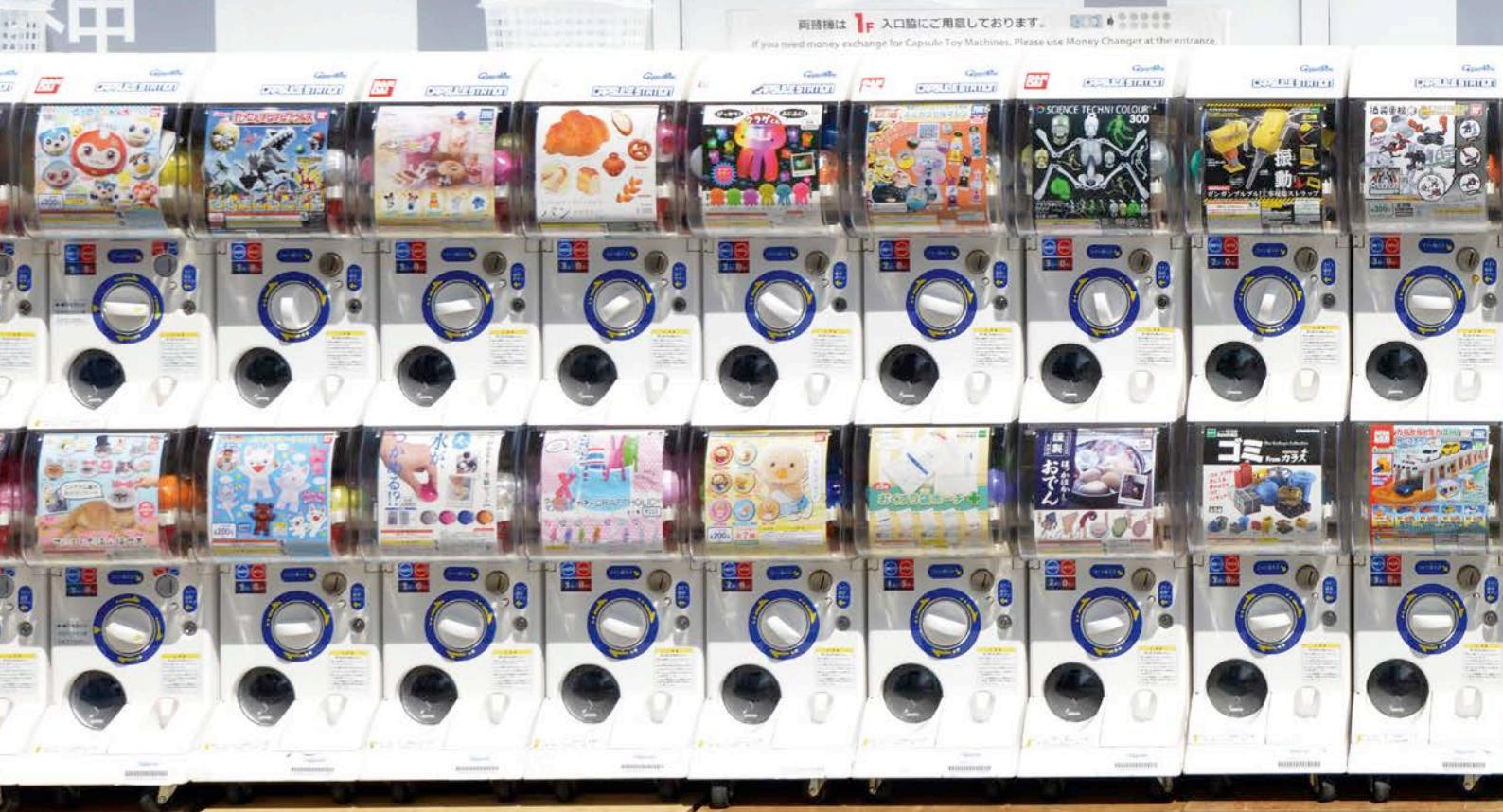
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trickles near the table, and I'm served by a gently shuffling waitress in a kimono. The food is a symphony of meticulous, seasonal courses that seems a world away from the casual eats of Kōenji and Yanesen.

Lunch starts with a sip of the hotel's own sake paired with cool slivers of sashimi and tart petals of ginger. Then the centrepiece, a shiny wooden 'lunch box' whose drawers reveal a suite of delicacies, including the most deliciously sweet, miso-marinated piece of salmon I've ever tasted.

"I started this job because I love eating," the hotel's affable executive chef, Keiji Miyabe, tells me as he shows me around his kitchens. He previously worked at a boutique hotel in Fuji-Hakone-Izu National Park, and says time flies by amid the thrills of Tokyo. Still seeking a handle on the place, I wonder, if Tokyo were a person, what type of person would it be? The chef pauses a moment, rubbing his thumb and forefinger together as he thinks.

"Maybe a person that owns what you and I don't have," he muses. "Maybe one that has everything, that has certain strengths we don't, but is also very gentle and kind to you." Tokyo has more Michelin stars than any other city, but Keiji loves the fact you can find every type of cuisine here — "from the high end to the soul food; everybody loves ramen!"

### A BOWL OF SOUL

Ain't that the truth. Ramen's the great leveller, a bowl of soul that unites everyone for a couple of hundred yen. I was gunning for one great example in Tokyo, and I knew the man to help me find it.

"Like most Westerners in this city, the first thing I got hooked on was the *tonkotsu*, which is the creamy pork soup," Brian MacDuckston tells me over coffee near his flat in Honmachi. Tall, smartly dressed and far thinner than I expected, Brian is the man behind Ramen Adventures, which offers private ramen tours of Tokyo — a business that evolved out of a move from San Francisco over a decade ago; he's also a prolific blogger on all things ramen. In his former life, Brian tells me, he was a burnt-out computer guy. He moved to Tokyo for a reboot, and his eureka moment came not long afterwards, when he finally decided to see what all the locals were queueing for outside a *ramen-ya* in Ikebukuro.

Brian talks me through ramen's origins as a 'new' food whose popularity was aided by cheap imports of American flour after the Second World War; a dish with its origin in Chinese-style wheat noodles, but which the Japanese made their own with mind-bendingly good, umami-rich broths. It's Japan's pasta — a comfort food that amounts to way more than the sum of its

*Veering between Japan's ancient cultural concept of *wa* ('harmony') and its mind-blowing, hypermodern virtual-reality show is a rite of passage*

**PREVIOUS PAGES:** Capsule vending machines, Akihabara  
**FROM LEFT:** A multi-course *keiseki* lunch at Wadakura, Palace Hotel Tokyo; a street corner in Kōenji district  
**NEXT PAGE:** Chefs preparing a prawn nigiri dish at Yamato Sushi





parts, and whose shops tie neighbourhoods and people together.

"You don't sit and chat with ramen," says Brian. "You go in, stop talking when your order comes, eat and go. Ramen nerds say that it takes just eight minutes for the noodles to go bad."

I'm almost afraid to ask him to recommend just one or two ramen shops, but eventually we settle on a neighbourhood joint near my hotel, a place Brian rates for its creamy broth with a spicy kick — which customers request on a scale of one to five for *kara* (chilli heat) and *shibi* (a numbing, Sichuan-style bang). What should I order? "They only have one dish," he replies. A couple of hours later, I'm standing outside a ramen-ya called Kikanbo, near Kanda Station, punching my order into a vending machine. Inside, the room is black, the stereo plays a *taiko* drumbeat, and three chefs are busy at work.

I shoot for a spice rating of three on both *kara* and *shibi*, and it takes just a couple of minutes for the bowl to arrive. Its broth is miso-magical, the noodles have bite, and slices of roast pork pull apart with a tug of the chopsticks. I watch the clock, but soon run over the eight minutes; not that anyone notices. All the customers are united in a Y800 (£5.45) slurpfest.

Tokyo can be a dizzying, disorientating city. "Even though I live here I feel like

a traveller," one local tells me. As I chew and chat my way through several neighbourhoods, however, I find a fleeting sense of equilibrium.

I join shoals of salarymen gobbling *yakitori* (skewered chicken) under the railway arches of Yūrakuchō. I take a tour of Tsukiji Fish Market with sushi chefs from The Prince Park Tower Hotel, where we slip through the melee of forklifts, seafood fridges and styrofoam crates to watch an expert slice and dice a 167kg scarlet-fleshed tuna. "It's pretty much the same as cutting a diamond," smiles the knifeman, Nobuhito Okado, wiping his blade clean.

Afterwards, we stop by the tiny Yamato Sushi where chefs pluck out different cuts of tuna, squid, eel and sea urchin to place on small boards in front of us. It's chaos outside. Carts are honking, tourists elbowing and the glass towers of Shibuya pumping out their neon razzle-dazzle.

Inside, however, there's a moment of zen. It's not quite like bumping into someone I know. But the chef's rolling of sushi rice between his thumb and palm triggers a recognition. He's doing what Yuko said he should, and for a split second, I feel connected to some kind of invisible current.

Call it a Tokyo minute. Just as quickly, it's gone. □

## ESSENTIALS



### Getting there & around

British Airways, Japan Airlines and ANA fly direct to Tokyo from Heathrow. Finnair flies there from Heathrow via Helsinki. [ba.com](http://ba.com) [jal.com](http://jal.com) [ana.co.jp](http://ana.co.jp) [finnair.com](http://finnair.com)  
Average flight time: 11h40m.

The best way to traverse sprawling Tokyo is on the impeccably punctual trains (signs are translated into English). Prepaid Suica and Pasmo travel cards work on both subway and overland JR Lines (top-up as you go). Taxis are reliable but expensive.

### When to go

Spring and autumn have the most comfortable climate with temperatures in the low 20Cs (July and August can be very humid), but remember that April means cherry blossom season — and a serious spike in prices. The 2019 Rugby World Cup takes place in Japan from 20 September to 2 November.

### Places mentioned

[CityUnscripted. cityunscripted.com](http://cityunscripted.com)  
[Ramen Adventures. ramenadventures.com](http://ramenadventures.com)  
[Tsukiji Fish Market. tsukiji.or.jp/english](http://tsukiji.or.jp/english)

### More info

[seejapan.co.uk](http://seejapan.co.uk)  
[enjoymyjapan.jp](http://enjoymyjapan.jp)

### How to do it

**INSIDE JAPAN TOURS** runs self-guided adventures and small-group tours in Japan, including Tokyo. Its nine-night Golden Route includes four nights in Tokyo, as well as visits to Hakone and Kyoto, from £1,690 (excluding flights). [insidejaptours.com](http://insidejaptours.com)

# FIT FOR *royalty*

**Focusing on distinctly Japanese experiences, as well as top-notch wellness and dining, Palace Hotel Tokyo offers a regal experience**



Situated opposite the ancient Otemon Gate of the Imperial Palace, overlooking its gardens and moats, Palace Hotel Tokyo has been making waves since it debuted in 2012.

The hotel — a magnet for travellers in search of Japan's legendary hospitality — showcases the best of the country's culture. Its 'Palatial Pursuits' are a series of packages featuring bespoke experiences such as 'ramen hunting,' behind-the-scenes glimpses of sumo wrestling or *kabuki* theatre, and tailor-made recreational adventures.

Palace Hotel Tokyo's 290 guest rooms and suites evoke a sense of warmth and sophistication, with luxurious touches such as private balconies overlooking the Imperial Palace gardens and moats as well as the surrounding city skyline. At evian SPA TOKYO, an Alpine-inspired setting and Japanese sensibilities combine to offer an ultra-refined experience. The hotel's vast array of restaurants and bars, meanwhile, offer 10 distinctive dining experiences, including exquisite Japanese at Wadakura, Michelin-starred Chinese at Amber Palace and Japanese-style afternoon tea at The Palace Lounge. And at Grand Kitchen, dining al fresco on the terrace will tempt guests to linger amid its blissful, picturesque setting.



PALACE HOTEL TOKYO

*For more information on Palace Hotel Tokyo, or to book one of the Palatial Pursuits, contact reservations on [reservations@palacehotel.jp](mailto:reservations@palacehotel.jp) or +81 3 3211 5211. [en.palacehoteltokyo.com](http://en.palacehoteltokyo.com)*



*City life*

# SANTIAGO



*Santiago is shaking things up with a flux of funky new hangouts and downtown facelifts, but its foundation of boho barrios, dive bars and street food remains as solid as ever*

**WORDS:** Amelia Duggan **PHOTOGRAPHS:** Cat Allen

If there's an art to eating a *completo* hotdog, then I never learnt it. Lashings of mayonnaise end up down my front and, later that day, I discover the dried remains of mashed avocado behind my ear. The vendor, a smiling matron in a striped apron, looks on with an encouraging nod as I polish off Santiago's beloved street snack. While some might mistake the mind-boggling pile-up of toppings for a sadistic challenge, it's really an expression of the generous spirit of the

people. Santiaguinos are eager to help, to please, to impress, to share — and there's a real deference towards travellers, who are still a bit of a novelty here. So when I give the hotdog seller a thumbs up, she looks momentarily overcome before scuttling to the next cart to share the good news.

I've returned to the Chilean capital — a city I once called home — after a five-year hiatus. Eager to take my taste buds down memory lane, I head to the pretty, boho

barrio of Bellavista to snaffle a pumpkin fritter known as a *sopapilla* with fresh, garlicky *pebre* sauce of diced onions, tomatoes and coriander. My next stop is a refreshments hut on the ramparts of the leafy Santa Lucía Hill. While I sip my ice-cold *mote con huesillo*, I'm rewarded with views across Santiago. It appears unchanged: there are the same glassy skyscrapers, charming colonial pockets and grand historical centre, and the distant diadem



of snow-capped Andean peaks just visible through a light smog.

But in my absence a flux of funky new hangouts and municipal facelifts has injected glamour into the city. There's Peumayen, with its daring reimaginings of indigenous dishes; funky expressions of Santiaguinos' party spirit in the form of cocktail joints Sarita Colonia and CHPE Libre; and uber-luxe hotel The Singular, whose steps Kate Moss was descending recently. I visit Calle Bandera,

too, which I remember as a ramshackle street of second-hand clothing shops, and discover a rainbow-striped pedestrianised lane with flowering troughs and people sipping coffee in deckchairs.

I'm relieved to find that these glitzy new additions haven't rubbed off on the city's ancient network of eccentric, gritty dive bars. In La Piojera, I'm greeted by a setup that has resisted change for nearly a century. There's sawdust on the floor, graffiti on the walls and

meat-tastic dishes including *churrasco* on offer. This, for me, will always feel like the real Santiago. The barkeep slops a beaker of *terremoto* to me. The strong cocktail of *pipeño* wine, grenadine and pineapple ice cream is named rather darkly after the earthquakes that rock the capital from time to time. One glass is enough to leave me unsteady, which seems an appropriate end to my trip as in the last few years, as I've discovered, Santiago has begun to shake things up. ➤

**Over the hill //** “It is an inexhaustible source of pleasure to climb Cerro Santa Lucía, a small hill that rises up in the centre of the city, from which the view is truly impressive and unique.” Charles Darwin, in 1834



### SEE & DO

**LA CHASCONA:** National icons don't get much more romantic than Nobel Prize-winning poet Pablo Neruda. His artsy love nest, built in 1953 for his flame-haired mistress, has been preserved as a museum at the foot of San Cristóbal Hill. The couple had an eye for interiors and collected fabulous *objets*, including art by such famous friends as Mexican muralist Diego Rivera. A visit is a step back to Santiago's bohemian heyday, and offers a glimpse into Neruda's sensational biography of exile, fame and assassination. [fundacionneruda.org](http://fundacionneruda.org)

**MUSEUM OF MEMORY AND HUMAN RIGHTS:** Santiago's vibrancy belies the atrocities committed in living memory by the Pinochet regime. The permanent collection at this powerful museum bears witness to life under the military dictatorship and honours the victims. [museodelamemoria.cl](http://museodelamemoria.cl)

**TAKE A HIKE:** For views of the Andean *cordillera* (at its least smoggy after a spot of rain), head to the top of Santa Lucía Hill with its charming gardens and ramparts, or take the old-fashioned funicular to the towering statue of the Virgin atop the much larger and wilder San Cristóbal Hill, stopping off at the scenic Antilén Swimming Pool for a dip. [parquemet.cl](http://parquemet.cl)

**CEMENTERIO GENERAL:** Santiaguinos hold flamboyant celebrations here in the run up to Día de los Muertos (1 November). Take a guided tour of its ostentatious mausoleums, including the resting places of President Salvador Allende and musician Víctor Jara,

both victims of the Pinochet years. After-dark tours come complete with a ghoulish guide. [tour.cementeriogeneral.cl](http://tour.cementeriogeneral.cl)

**MERCADO CENTRAL:** This working fish market is housed in a pretty 19th-century building near the Mapocho River. Tourists head for the restaurants in the central courtyard, under a wrought iron dome, but the smaller places around the periphery serve up *ceviche*, *caldillo de congrio* and seafood *empanadas* at a better price. [mercadocentral.cl](http://mercadocentral.cl)

**PLAZA DE ARMAS:** This grand central square with its imposing neoclassical cathedral is the heart of the city, and great for people watching. The perfect antidote to the colonial pomp is the Chilean Museum of Pre-Columbian Art: chock full of Mesoamerican and Andean art spanning 10,000 years, housed in a mansion on the square's southwest corner. [precolombino.cl](http://precolombino.cl)

**FOTO RUTA:** For a different angle on the city, sign up for a tutorial and tour with a local photographer. It can be a private one-on-one affair or taken in a small group, and is open to everyone from novices to pros, and you don't need special kit. Even a phone camera will do. The day kicks off with a customised workshop and then moves out on to the streets to capture holiday snaps worth framing. [foto-ruta.cl](http://foto-ruta.cl)

**CONCHA Y TORO VINEYARD:** The vines of internally renowned Concha y Toro can be visited from Santiago central on the metro (Line 4 to Plaza de Puente Alto). Book ahead for tastings and cellar tours in English. [conchaytoro.com](http://conchaytoro.com)

**PREVIOUS PAGE:** A local playing the saxophone in downtown Santiago

#### CLOCKWISE FROM TOP

**LEFT:** The cathedral in Plaza de Armas; musicians practise in Parque Forestal; photos showing the victims of the 1973 military coup in the Museum of Memory and Human Rights; chess players in Plaza de Armas



**EAT**

**EMPORIO LA ROSA:** Get in line: there's always a queue at this ice cream parlour. Some 17 years since it opened its doors, Santiaguinos are still enraptured by the ever-evolving menu of exotic flavours — currently including rose, *cherimoya* (custard apple) and the caramelly *lúcuma* fruit. [emporiolarosa.com](http://emporiolarosa.com)

**LA DIANA:** Housed in a former monastery, La Diana restaurant with its multilevel dining nooks and fantastical assemblage of upcycled antiques and junk is a sight to behold. The aesthetic is chic yet playful, like something The Lost Boys would have created for themselves in Neverland if they'd actually grown up. It's right next door to a retro games arcade, too. [ladiana.cl](http://ladiana.cl)

**PEUMAYEN:** The pinnacle of Santiago's culinary reinvention is the much-lauded Peumayen, a pilgrimage for foodies since it opened in 2013. The menu draws from the ancient cuisines of Chile's native peoples — the Mapuche, Aymara and Rapa Nui — with their unusual meats and forgotten flavours. Opt for a tasting menu for a culinary tour of the nation and its indigenous roots from the Atacama Desert right down to Patagonia via Easter Island. [peumayenchile.cl](http://peumayenchile.cl)

**AFTER HOURS**

**CHPE LIBRE:** To hear it from a Santiaguino, the pisco sour is a Chilean invention. Talk to a Peruvian and it's a different story. Relations between the countries over this matter are... sour. But a new bar in Lastarria has sidestepped the squabble by declaring their premises 'The Independent Republic of Pisco'. It's the bar del día, with an extensive cocktail menu and tasting flights dedicated to the South American brandy. Reserve ahead for a table in the leafy patio. *José Victorino Lastarria* 282. T: 00 562 2664 0584.

**FOR LIVE MUSIC:** One of the best windows into Chilean culture is joining in a knees-up to the high-tempo, folkloric rhythms of a live Cumbia band. Popular venues include Fonda La Peña de Nano Parra and Onaciú, both in Bellavista. [facebook.com/penananoparra](http://facebook.com/penananoparra) [onaciu.com](http://onaciu.com)

**PIO NONO STREET:** Santiago's nightlife thoroughfare is the place to start any evening out. Begin with drinks in Bar Constitución or the classy restaurant hub of Patio Bellavista before moving on to one of the road's countless beer halls. The city's best gay clubs, like Espacio Bunker, are a few streets over on Bombero Núñez. [patiobellavista.cl](http://patiobellavista.cl)

**Fiestas Patrias // Chile**

celebrates its independence on 18 September with a week of riotous partying, processions and patriotism, with Santiago's *fondas* — tented venues set up in parks — selling *terremotos* cocktails, and hosting such particular national pastimes as cueca dancing and rodeos





## BUY

**BIO BÍO FLEA MARKET:** Hop off the metro at Franklin and go digging for treasure in this charmingly chaotic complex of *galpones* (warehouses) and street stalls.

Antique furniture, vintage cameras, retro posters, surgical supplies... you name it, you'll find it at Bio Bío. Try local street food here, too. Just keep an eye out for pickpockets. (Open Saturday and Sunday).

**BARRIO PATRONATO:** This bustling low-rise area is the city's garment district, full of wholesalers touting wares at bargain prices. It's also home to the city's Lebanese and Korean populations; Sukine is a great spot to recharge with *bibimbap*. Immediately west of Patronato are the giant produce markets of La Vega, worth dipping into for the sheer spectacle. [sukine.com](http://sukine.com)

**FOR SOUVENIRS:** Alpaca shawls and lapis lazuli jewellery are among the souvenirs up for grabs at downtown's Santa Lucía Artisanal Market, and its more touristy counterpart in the restaurant hub of Patio Bellavista. The artisan village near Los Dominicos metro has the most upmarket offerings of the three, with some artists' work available to buy at their workshops. [patiobellavista.cl](http://patiobellavista.cl) [plosdomonicos.cl](http://plosdomonicos.cl)

## LIKE A LOCAL

**CATCH A GAME:** Santiaguinos

obsession with the beautiful game reaches fever pitch during international matches, and when local teams Colo-Colo and Universidad de Chile (known as La 'U') go head to head for the El Clásico derby. Important games are likely to be held at Estadio Nacional where an area of benches is always left vacant to remember the political prisoners executed in the stadium under the dictatorship.

[ticketpro.cl](http://ticketpro.cl)

**CAFÉ CON PIERNAS:** Perhaps the most bizarre manifestation of Latin America's machismo culture, café con piernas — or literally, 'coffee with legs' — are coffee shops where the waitresses are dressed provocatively.

These establishments range from the downright seedy (signalled by blackout windows) to the more palatable. Cafe Bombay is an accessible place to experience this uniquely Chilean phenomenon. Teatinos 273. T: 00 562 2696 0664.

**LA PIOJERA:** Over a century of serving up powerful terremoto cocktails and hearty meat platters to Santiago's working class folk, The Fleahouse (as the bar's name translates) is still going strong, and is a beloved institution. [lapiojera.cl](http://lapiojera.cl)

**FROM LEFT:** A fruit seller in La Vega market; La Piojera bar, home to the terremoto drink; book and antique market in Lastarria; 'Tuna' cactus fruit for sale in La Vega





## SLEEP

### PROVIDENCIA BED & BREAKFAST:

This spic-and-span, family-run guest house in the well-heeled suburb of Providencia, just east of Santiago's centre, has six airy rooms in the atmospheric environs of a century-old manor. [providenciabedandbreakfast.com](http://providenciabedandbreakfast.com)

**MATILDAS HOTEL BOUTIQUE:** Ideal for a romantic escape, this Belle Époque mansion in Barrio Brasil is a classy oasis in a pretty, offbeat part of town. Enjoy the local weekend markets, and the boating lakes and museums in nearby Quinta Normal Park. [matildashotel.com](http://matildashotel.com)

**THE SINGULAR:** By far the most lavish five-star around, occupying prime real estate among the elegant bars and shops of Lastarria, The Singular feels like the swish town house of one's dreams. The service, the restaurant, the rooftop bar — all singularly excellent. [thesingular.com](http://thesingular.com)

**FROM ABOVE:** A view of downtown from Cerro Santa Lucía; Matildas Hotel Boutique

## ESSENTIALS

### Getting there & around

British Airways launched the only direct flights between the UK and Santiago at the start of 2017, flying from Heathrow four times a week. [ba.com](http://ba.com)

Average flight time: 15h.

European carriers such as Iberia and Air France offer one-stop flights via their European hubs, while Avianca flies via Bogota, and the likes of American, Delta and United via US hubs.

[airfrance.co.uk](http://airfrance.co.uk) [aa.com](http://aa.com) [m.avia.com](http://m.avia.com) [delta.com](http://delta.com) [iberia.com](http://iberia.com) [united.com](http://united.com)

Average flight time: 17h.

It's possible to explore the majority of Santiago's attractions on foot. For sights further afield, buy and load a Bip Card (at any metro station) to use on the metro system, or rent a city bike. The bus network is notoriously complicated and best avoided. [bikesantiago.cl](http://bikesantiago.cl) [labicicletaverde.com](http://labicicletaverde.com)

### When to go

Santiago's spring and autumn seasons (late-September to November, and March to May respectively) are particularly lovely, with mild temperatures and clear skies. The summer months either side of new year promise highs of 35C, while winter is much cooler, with increased smog and showers.

### More info

[chile.travel/en](http://chile.travel/en)

*Rough Guide to Chile*. RRP: £16.99

*Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair*, Pablo Neruda. RRP: £7.99

No (2012 film)

### How to do it

**COX & KINGS** offers three nights in Santiago at Plaza San Francisco Hotel from £495 per person, with private transfers and excursions. Excursions include a half-day tour to the Museum of Memory and Human Rights, a half-day tour to a winery and a full-day tour to the city of Valparaiso. Excludes flights. [coxandkings.co.uk](http://coxandkings.co.uk)

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ADVERTISEMENT FEATURE



# The Jewel of the Atlantic

The Azores are located in the Atlantic Ocean, between Europe and America. The islands of the archipelago, an autonomous Region of Portugal, are divided into three geographical groups: the Eastern Group, comprising Santa Maria and São Miguel; the Central Group, including Terceira, Graciosa, São Jorge, Pico and Faial; and the Western Group, composed by Corvo and Flores.

Each Azorean island has its own identity. An extraordinary natural legacy, they all have their own unique landscapes, traditions, cuisine and architecture. There are no words capable of describing and classifying the charm of these nine charismatic islands. They've been sculptured by ancient volcanoes and populated over the centuries by courageous and kind people. Thus the Azores are a place of varied experiences and emotions.



Hiking

For centuries, the easiest way to travel from one place to another within the same island was by sea; the few paths there were tended not to be suitable for carriages or oxcarts. There were mainly footpaths, which the islanders used in their daily toil, accompanied by horses, donkeys and mules, of course. The paths were also used to take cattle to or from the pasturelands. The locals also used these paths for festivities in the vicinity, and for transporting agricultural produce, fish, charcoal and other merchandise to trade. Anything larger was transported by boat.



Whale Watching

The Azores are currently one of the world's largest whale sanctuaries. More than 20 different types of cetaceans can be spotted here. It's an impressive figure and it corresponds to a third of the total number of existing species. This is an ecosystem with unique characteristics. With majestic whales and friendly dolphins, the blue Atlantic Ocean becomes even more magic around these nine islands. And it brings to the present, when preservation is the keyword, an old cry: "How she blows!"

VISITAZORES.COM



## Scuba Diving

Imagine a place where whale sharks swim through crystal clear-waters beneath you, shoals of devil rays swoop above and curious blue sharks and huge pelagic fish explore the water with you. This is diving in the Azores, a remote archipelago of nine islands that sit in the Atlantic just a few hours from mainland Europe and North America. Regularly voted a top destination by travel guides, this largely undiscovered paradise offers a huge variety of dive sites, rich in abundant marine life.



## Birdwatching

The Azores are internationally recognised as a birdwatching destination. Due to its central position in the North Atlantic Ocean, it's possible to observe several migratory species in the Azores, when the weather throws off course on their migration route. Also possible to observe seabirds that nest in the Azores and endemic species and subspecies.



FOLLOW US ON



A scenic view of a coastal landscape with green hills, a winding road, and a body of water under a clear sky.

10

# Reasons to visit the Azores

- 1 Swimming with wild dolphins and world-class whale-watching
- 2 Unique Portuguese islands less than four away
- 3 An abundance of inexpensive locally sourced produce
- 4 Variety of exciting options for adventure seekers and families alike
- 5 Stunning natural beauty
- 6 A safe and tranquil place to relax and unwind
- 7 Rich cultural heritage and unique identity
- 8 A range of affordable accommodation
- 9 Health and wellbeing
- 10 An award-winning sustainable tourism destination

# TRAVEL GEEKS

## ASK THE EXPERTS

NEED ADVICE FOR YOUR NEXT TRIP?  
ARE YOU AFTER RECOMMENDATIONS,  
TIPS AND GUIDANCE? THE TRAVEL  
GEEKS HAVE THE ANSWERS...

**Q //** I'd like to book an adventurous long weekend in Europe — any recommendations?



Why not look at what's on your doorstep? I would head for the Highlands of Scotland on a sleeper train. There's an excited buzz in the air as the train pulls slowly out of London on a Friday evening and you settle down with a drink from the bar carriage. When you wake up, you're in the Highlands. From Inverness, zoom north in a hire car (Focus Rentals meets you off the train with your car in Inverness) and head for the empty, desolate beauty of Assynt. Suilven is my favourite mountain in the UK and a fine destination. You can camp wild wherever you wish in

Scotland (within reason), or you could stay in the lovely bothy that looks over Suilven. Assynt has fabulous hills, lochs galore, and empty, sandy beaches. It feels a million miles away from the hustle and bustle of the city. Then, on Sunday evening, I would take the sleeper train back home, arriving nicely in time for the start of the working week.

**ALASTAIR HUMPHREYS**

Long weekends can become quite forced if they involve lengthy travel, although at the same time you want to feel you're going somewhere special. I'd recommend Salzburg, which is under two hours' flight from the UK but still feels nicely far-flung. The city itself is a decadent blow-out of baroque domes and spires and offers an implausibly

large selection of coffee and cake. It was also Mozart's hometown, of course, which holds its own appeal. But look beyond the city limits and you'll find another fine reason to visit. Some of Austria's best outdoor scenery is on Salzburg's doorstep.

Thirty minutes' drive to the west brings you to the lakes and mountains of the Salzkammergut region. Nobles and aristocrats used to base themselves here for weeks at a time to wallow in the scenery and fresh air, although these days it's geared as much to active travellers as it is to sedentary tourists. Try basing yourself at lovely Fuschlsee — the closest of the lakes to Salzburg — where you can try everything from stand-up paddleboarding and hillwalking to golf and road biking. **BEN LERWILL**



## Q // My hand luggage was put in the hold. Am I covered for this?

Typically, travel insurance policies will not cover an individual for valuables that go missing from hold-stored luggage, so there are some things to be mindful of if you're requested to place bags in the hold. If hold luggage is lost, delayed or damaged in transit, the airline is liable, so you must let it know as soon as possible if there's a problem.

Most airlines have a baggage desk within the baggage reclaim

area, so visit that before you leave the airport and obtain a Property Irregularity Report (PIR). All claims to the airline for lost, stolen or damaged items must be made in writing within seven days from the loss date and claims for delayed luggage within 21 days from receiving the delayed bag.

A good idea is to have a small drawstring or tote bag to hand for your main valuables in case your luggage ends up having to be put in the hold. **SIMON COSTELLO**

## Q // What pre-existing medical conditions are covered with travel insurance?

Many travel insurance providers offer specific policies for people with 'pre-existing medical conditions'. This term usually refers to any condition for which medical advice, diagnosis or treatment has been given or recommended prior to the point of departure for your trip. And, given our latest research found that almost half (46%) of Brits don't read their travel insurance policy in detail before purchase, it's strongly advised that you always refer to the policy wording and check that your condition will be covered under the policy.

Holiday Extras, for example, covers illnesses such as high blood pressure, cholesterol and

heart conditions. However, each policy will be different, and there are conditions more commonly excluded from cover, such as terminal illnesses, cancer and any symptoms which are not declared or are under investigation. As a rule of thumb, all medical conditions should be declared. **ANT CLARKE COWELL**



## Q // I'd love to go to Nuremberg Christmas Market this year. Is it too late to book accommodation?

Nuremberg is one of the most popular German markets for UK visitors. With that first enticing aroma of gingerbread, mulled wine, grilled sausages and other regional culinary specialities you know you're in for a memorable time. The Christmas market there runs from 30 November to 24 December this year, and whether

booking independently or through a tour operator, it's important to book as early as possible. But it's too late just yet. Weekends leading up to Christmas are, of course, the busiest times so if you can include a weekday or two, it should be easier to find accommodation. If you're on a budget, you could try

the youth hostel, which is great for younger travellers and families. Hotel Elch and Hotel Agneshof are in the mid price range. For a splash-out, try Sheraton Carlton or Le Méridien Grand Hotel. To gauge prices, it's best to put in your ideal dates as they change often.

**BEATRIX HAUN**

## health corner

### Q // I've heard there have been outbreaks of dengue fever lately. What can I do?

Dengue fever is a viral illness spread by mosquitoes that bite during the day. It's rife in the tropics and now endemic in more than 100 countries, with severe outbreaks associated with unusually heavy monsoon rains.

There's no widely available, effective vaccine, so avoiding bites is the only real option. For example: cover up, use repellents and nets, and try to keep away from built-up areas where sources of stagnant water form the perfect breeding ground for these mosquitoes.

Symptoms are generally mild, lasting about a week and may include a fever, headache, pain behind the eyes, muscle and joint pains, nausea and a red rash.

Treatment is simply rest, rehydration and paracetamol for the fever. Do not use ibuprofen or aspirin as very rarely the illness can develop into a life-threatening dengue haemorrhagic fever. **DR PAT GARROD**

## THE EXPERTS



ALASTAIR HUMPHREYS //  
AUTHOR OF GREAT  
ADVENTURERS,  
[ALASTAIRHUMPHREYS.COM](http://ALASTAIRHUMPHREYS.COM)



BEN LERWILL // FREELANCE  
TRAVEL WRITER,  
[BENLERWILL.COM](http://BENLERWILL.COM)



BEATRIX HAUN // GERMAN  
NATIONAL TOURIST OFFICE  
UK AND IRELAND



ANT CLARKE COWELL //  
[HOLIDAY EXTRAS](http://HOLIDAYEXTRAS)



SIMON COSTELLO //  
[ALLIANZ PARTNERS UK](http://ALLIANZPARTNERSUK)



DR PAT GARROD //  
[THEWORLDOVERLAND.COM](http://THEWORLDOVERLAND.COM)

THE INFO

# PLANE SPEAKING

TUNING IN TO AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL, WE DECODE THE MYSTIFYING LANGUAGE OF THE SKIES, FROM CALL SIGNS TO ACRONYMS

## Weird words

Air traffic control uses a unique blend of specialised words and phrases to avoid misunderstandings with people whose first language isn't English.

## KNOW THE LINGO

### Go around

When a landing can't be completed — often due to a blocked runway or poor weather.

### Squawk

A plane's four-digit code, making it visible on radar — converted to a call sign so controllers can see it in their sector.

### Flight level

An aircraft's altitude above a sea level pressure. All planes at high level are on the same setting so they can be separated vertically by at least 1,000ft.

### Deadhead

A cabin crew member travelling in a passenger seat.

## Aviation acronyms: decoded



## CALL SIGNS: THE UNIQUE 'NICKNAMES' USED TO IDENTIFY DIFFERENT AIRLINES

SHAMROCK: Aer Lingus

SPEEDBIRD: British Airways

SPRINGBOK: South African Airways

EUROTRANS: DHL

FLYING BULGARIA: Bulgaria Air

JERSEY: FlyBe

CACTUS: America West Airlines

DYNASTY: China Airlines

CEDARJET: Middle East Airlines

FIREBIRD: Cargo Logic

CHANNEX: Jet2

BEALINE: British European Airlines

CLIPPER: Pan American World Airways

INDONESIA: Garuda

BOHAI: Tianjin Airlines



## Are you smart enough?

GCSE maths and English at grade 9-4 (A\*-C): the minimum required qualifications to qualify for air traffic control training. Inspired? NATS (National Air Traffic Services) is currently recruiting. [nats.aero/careers](http://nats.aero/careers)

## HOT TOPIC

# WHAT THE PACKAGE TRAVEL DIRECTIVE MEANS FOR YOU

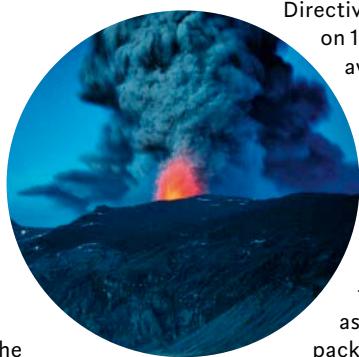
MORE TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS HAVE BECOME CLASSED AS 'PACKAGES' UNDER NEW EU LEGISLATION, OFFERING BETTER PROTECTION TO 120 MILLION CONSUMERS. WHAT DO THE RULES MEAN, AND ARE THERE LOOPHOLES? WORDS: JAMES DRAVEN

In April 2010, Eyjafjallajökull, the tongue-twisting Icelandic volcano started spewing ash up to six miles into the atmosphere, closing most of Europe's airspace — at the precise moment I was on my way to the airport to catch a flight to Peru.

Had a package tour operator arranged my trip, the headache would likely have been theirs, but I booked with an online travel agent (OTA), which actually meant I had separate contracts for each element of my trip, and ended up spending the next few days cancelling and rescheduling hotels, ground transportation, and internal flights.

That's the great thing about traditional package holidays: while you may lose some of the freedom to tailor your holiday down to the smallest detail, package trips offer a fantastic level of protection.

The EU's 1990 Package Travel Directive gave consumers the right to hold their package organiser responsible for anything that went wrong with their holiday, even if the



service in question was delivered by another supplier.

However, in our internet age, the legislation hasn't kept up with the times, and this level of protection hasn't necessarily applied to accommodation and/or car hire booked through an airline's website or an OTA. Many of these deals may have looked like package holidays to consumers but were actually a collection of separate services.

The UK responded to this by introducing the Flight-Plus scheme in 2012, which offered some financial protection for flights booked with accommodation and/or car hire from the same provider within one day, but not the level of liability a package organiser accepts.

Now there's been another shake-up: the EU Package Travel Directive, introduced on 1 July 2018, did away with the Flight-Plus trip category. The types of travel arrangement previously covered by it are now treated either as traditional packages, with all the

protection that implies, or the new Linked Travel Arrangement (LTA). The latter is designed to offer limited financial protection to bookings that fall outside the definition of a package, chiefly websites that encourage customers to purchase another travel service separately for the same trip, or clicking through to another trader to make that purchase within 24 hours.

"Unfortunately, LTAs will enable airlines and other organisers to sidestep the regulations and provide even less cover than under the old Flight-Plus scheme," says Derek Moore, chairman of AITO (Association of Independent Tour Operators).

"A case in point is Expedia," Moore tells me, "which has come up with a scheme offering very little protection at all. They'll book the flight for their clients, but then encourage clients to book accommodation at any time before travel, actively encouraging consumers not to book a package, which is pretty underhand and means the client has no protection whatsoever."

The bottom line is that, while the legislation is clearly a step in the right direction, many are concerned that its complexities and loopholes will leave most travellers dumbstruck.

## AND ANOTHER THING... ROUTES TO EUROPE

### COLOGNE

After Christmas kitsch and foaming steins of Kolsch this winter? British Airways will fly from Gatwick to Germany's fourth-largest city four times a week from November. [ba.com](#)

### RIGA

Ryanair may be closing its Glasgow base in November, but the budget airline has added 11 new routes from Edinburgh this winter, including a weekly service to the Latvian capital. [ryanair.com](#)

### TOULOUSE

As part of its roster of new routes this winter, EasyJet will be linking Liverpool with the southern French city four times a week. Flights will start taking off from the end of October. [easyjet.com](#)

### PALMA

British Airways is upping its service to the Majorcan capital, flying from Gatwick three times a week, year-round. It's also boosting its number of flights to Alicante and Seville. [ba.com](#)



## CHECKLIST: GAP YEAR MATTERS



**PATAGONIA NANO PUFF JACKET  
WITH PRIMALOFT INSULATION**  
RRP: £180. [eu.patagonia.com](http://eu.patagonia.com)



**ROHAN DISTRICT SHIRT**  
RRP: £65. [rohan.co.uk](http://rohan.co.uk)



**CRAGHOPPERS  
CONVERTIBLE TROUSERS**  
RRP: £55. [craghoppers.com](http://craghoppers.com)



**KEEN UNEEK EXO SHOE**  
RRP: £79.99. [keenfootwear.com](http://keenfootwear.com)



**LEFRIK FOLDABLE TROLLEY**  
RRP: £99. [lefrik.com](http://lefrik.com)



MORE PEOPLE THAN EVER ARE TAKING A YEAR OFF WORK LATER IN LIFE TO TRAVEL OR ARE PLANNING A GLOBETROTTING RETIREMENT. WE ASK THREE WOMEN WHO'VE DONE IT TO SHARE THEIR ADVICE ON WHERE TO START

### 1 // PACE YOURSELF

Before you set off, plan where you're going, but remember to be realistic. You may be visiting more than one country or region on your gap year but don't exhaust yourself trying to see too much. Youngsters might gad about all the time but us more mature travellers know the benefit of slowing down. Focus on getting a feel for a place and seeing a few of the major sights, but also taking time to discover the local culture, cuisine, history and people. **ZD**

### 2 // LUGGAGE SAVVY

Some older travellers may have concerns about carrying a heavy rucksack. While a suitcase on wheels might seem appealing, sooner or later you're sure to come across rough roads that are impossible to wheel your suitcase along. Opt for a rucksack with wheels — the best of both worlds. **KB**

### 3 // STAY FLEXIBLE

If you're a cautious traveller, it's tempting to book everything in advance. But if your plans are too inflexible, you may miss out on opportunities that arise, or the chance to stay longer in a place you love. It's better to plan accommodation for the first couple of days in a new place, then book ahead as your plans develop. **HC**

### 4 // PACK LIGHT

There are some fabulous clothing ranges available that make great use of modern technology and are designed specifically with packing light in mind. High-quality ranges [such as Rohan or Jack Wolfskin] aren't cheap, but it's worth investing in a travel wardrobe of lightweight,

quick-drying and crease-resistant clothing that packs down to a surprisingly small size. This significantly reduce the volume of your luggage. **KB**

### 5 // HEAD DOWN

Choose your accommodation carefully, especially if you're travelling solo. Small, friendly guest houses and family-run hotels will give you a better experience than impersonal larger hotels. Look at hostels too. They're not just for the younger crowd as most have private rooms and enable you to connect with travellers of all ages. House sits, if you're happy to stay in one place for a while, are also worth considering to minimise your costs. **HC**

### 6 // GET SMART!

Your smartphone is one of your trustiest sidekicks. Not only does it work as a phone and camera, but apps, such as online guides, maps, currency converters and accommodation information, can be extremely useful. Even if you're not on social media, WhatsApp is great for sharing stories and photos. Get familiar with it all before you leave and don't forget a power pack to keep it charged up on the move. **ZD**

### 7 // GET COVERED

Make sure your travel insurance covers you for the length and type of travel you're planning, especially when it comes to any unexpected medical treatment or repatriation. You may need to shop around to ensure you're covered for extended travel or adventurous activities. Get a small medical kit and pack any medication you take for existing conditions. **HC**

## THE RISE OF *the grown-up gap year*

You can read more tales and tips about travelling during a golden gap year from the women behind these tips on their blogs:

**Zoë Dawes**  
[thequirkytraveller.com](http://thequirkytraveller.com)

**Kathryn Burrington**  
[travelwithkat.com](http://travelwithkat.com)

**Heather Cowper**  
[heatheronhertravels.com](http://heatheronhertravels.com)



# Tech traveller

TECHNOLOGY REPORTER FOR @BBCCLICK AND AUTHOR OF WORKING THE CLOUD, KATE RUSSELL PICKS THE LATEST INNOVATIONS

## MONEY TRAVELS

**With the pound in decline since we voted for Brexit, travelling abroad is becoming more expensive. So how can you save yourself some money?**

You can save money buying foreign currency by using a peer-to-peer exchange service like WeSwap or Revolut. They work via a credit card that you load up with spending money in sterling. When you use it abroad, instead of completing the transaction through a bank, it pairs you up with a person who has the currency you're after on their card. As well as saving the hassle of exchanging sterling into your holiday currency, and then back again when you come home, cutting out the middle people saves you those transaction fees. At the time of writing, WeSwap

says you'll get €1,122 for £1,000. That's €12 more than Travelex, and could be as much as €36 more than a bank transaction. Revolut provides similar rates but you'll pay less for cash withdrawals under £200. The cards will hold multiple currencies too, so if you follow the money markets carefully you could craft a better deal buying different currencies at the right time. If you're not so good at forward planning, one of the worst things you can do is buy currency in the airport. If you've got a specialist overseas credit card, like the Halifax Clarity or Creation Everyday, there will be no extra fees for using it abroad either. For cash in your pocket you can use [moneysavingexpert.com](http://moneysavingexpert.com)'s Travel Money comparison tool to find the best exchange deals at the time of purchase.



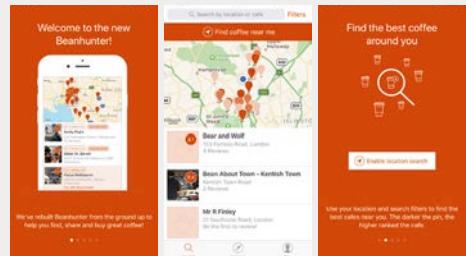
### GET THE GADGET

#### Million Mile Light

The Million Mile Light is a battery-free solution to being seen in the dark. It works with even the slightest motion and is 100% guaranteed for a million miles — which the makers judge to be five years. I backed this project on Kickstarter last year as I was impressed by the concept. It's really effective; a lightweight device that can be

clipped to your clothing and puts out a bright strobing light as you move. Other uses include keeping track of dogs or energetic children on an evening out. The most recent model is waterproof, keeping it safe if it's raining, or if you accidentally put it through the washing machine with your clothes. Available from £12. [batteryfree.co.uk](http://batteryfree.co.uk)

{ TOP APPS FOR...  
the power of peer }



#### BEANHUNTER

IOS/ANDROID FREE

Beanhunter uses peer reviews and recommendations to help you find that caffeine fix by simply pressing the big red button marked 'Find coffee near me'. [beanhunter.com](http://beanhunter.com)

#### UBER

IOS/ANDROID FREE

Operating in more than 600 cities, Uber has become one of the simplest ways to find a local taxi. [uber.com](http://uber.com)

#### AIRBNB

IOS/ANDROID FREE

Find unique holiday accommodations at prices often well below hotel rates. [airbnb.co.uk](http://airbnb.co.uk)

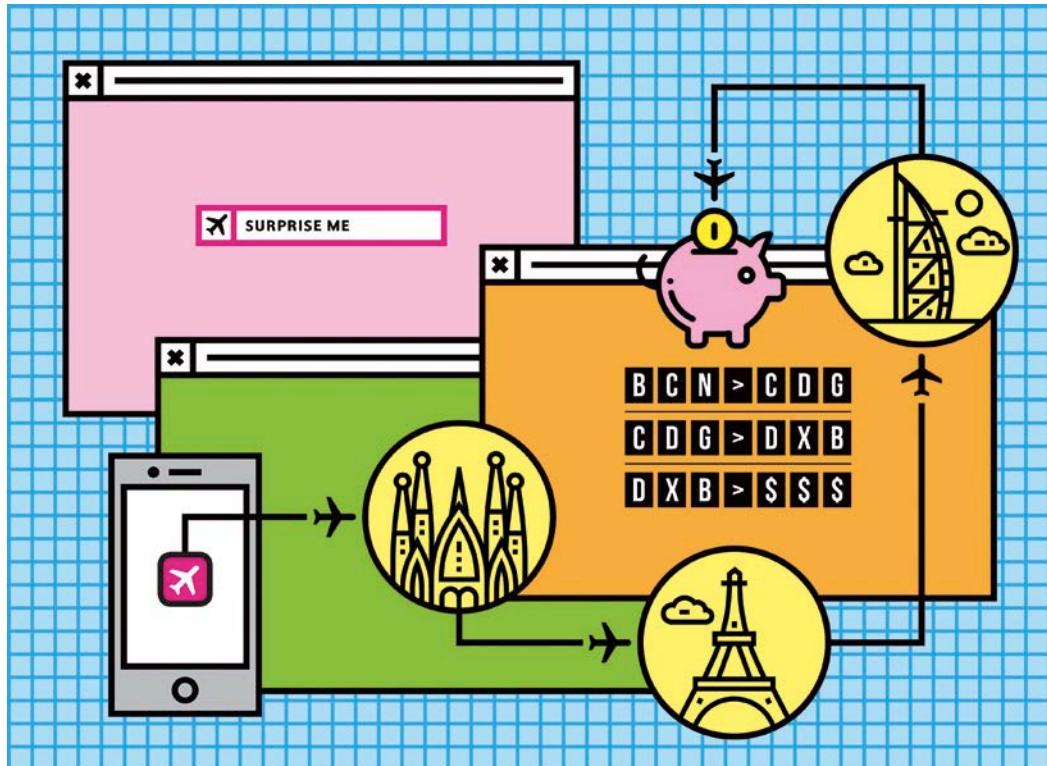
#### ZOMATO

IOS/ANDROID FREE

Available in more than 22 countries, this location-sensitive restaurant discovery app uses peer reviews and recommendations, with most reviewers adding photos to help you decide where to eat. [zomato.com](http://zomato.com)



@katerussell  
[katerussell.co.uk](http://katerussell.co.uk)

**FREQUENT FLYER**

# FLIGHT COMPARISON SITES

THEY CAN SAVE YOU TIME ON YOUR SEARCH FOR THE IDEAL FLIGHT, BUT ARE AGGREGATORS WORTH USING? WORDS: DAVID WHITLEY

## What are flight comparison sites?

Put simply, when you go to make a booking on an airline's own website, it brings up options with that airline. Use a flight comparison site — such as Kayak, Skyscanner or Momondo — and it compares across several airlines. At the very basic level, this allows you to see which airline is offering the cheapest tickets.

## So what's the deal?

If you're looking to see which airline offers the best fares for the particular route you want to fly, then they're pretty useful. But they can be useful for much more than that. For example, many — such as Skyscanner — allow you to leave the destination blank, so you can pick an endpoint based on low prices. Others, including Google Flights, allow you to choose multiple departure airports, so you can work out whether it's cheaper to go from Manchester, Leeds-Bradford or East Midlands, for example. And many, including ITA Matrix, allow you to play with date ranges and see results for dates a couple of days either side.

## Which are the best?

If you want an easy answer to that, then you're likely to be sorely disappointed.

There's an element of survival of the fittest about it — there have been hundreds of comparison sites since the dawn of the internet, and many have collapsed or been subsumed by a bigger rival. Numerous publications have conducted studies into which offers the cheapest deals, and there's no consistent winner on this front.

The best advice is to check using two or three of the main players. The one that flags up the best deal for a one-stop flight between Edinburgh and Kuala Lumpur may be different to the one that finds the best cheap hop from Stansted to Málaga.

## Is it all about price?

Not necessarily. Once you start playing with the filters on the site, you start to realise much of the value is in getting the right flight rather than the cheapest one. So, on ITA Matrix, you can choose to rule out particular airlines and stopover airports. On Kayak you can set a maximum time for an airport layover. On Skyscanner, you might rule out all departures before a set time in the morning. And on Momondo you can choose to eliminate overnight 'red-eye' flights or only include options that offer in-flight wi-fi.

## TRIED & TESTED

### Comparing the aggregators

#### KAYAK

**Strengths:** Reliably cheap, if not always the cheapest. Strong on long-haul. Can check price with or without checked-in bags.  
**Weaknesses:** For bookings, it occasionally sends you to travel agencies where the price is no longer available, rather than direct with the airline. [kayak.co.uk](http://kayak.co.uk)

#### MOMONDO

**Strengths:** Lots of filters and gadgets. Very intuitive bar chart-style display of prices across a month.  
**Weaknesses:** You have to put in exact dates, rather than allowing for a range. This makes checking across various dates rather slow. [momondo.co.uk](http://momondo.co.uk)

#### SKYSCANNER

**Strengths:** Tends to be stronger on short-haul with budget airlines than long haul. Put 'everywhere' in as a destination, and it sorts the world in price order.  
**Weaknesses:** It tends to struggle — and not offer nearly as much flexibility — on multi-stop itineraries. [skyscanner.net](http://skyscanner.net)

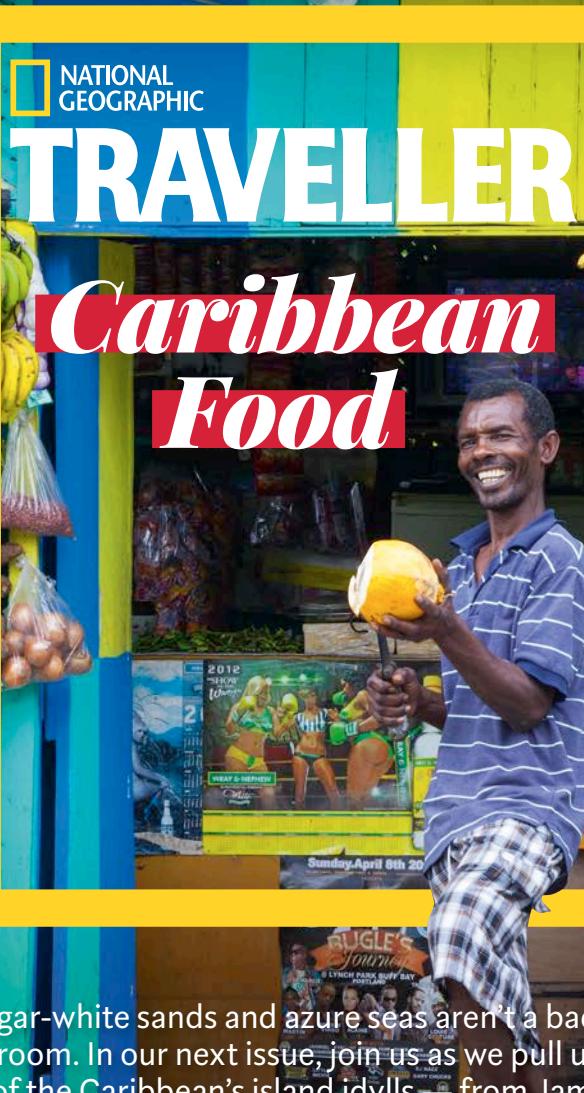
#### GOOGLE FLIGHTS

**Strengths:** Extremely quick, and mobile-friendly. Brings up prices on a grid while you're selecting dates to easily find the cheapest.  
**Weaknesses:** Fewer immediately obvious bells, whistles and filters than other sites — although there are some hidden goodies. [google.com/flights](http://google.com/flights)

#### ITA MATRIX

**Strengths:** Greatest degree of flexibility, making it the best bet for plotting more complicated routes. It's the closest system and site to the one travel agents use.  
**Weaknesses:** It's a bit tricky to use, and you can't book directly from it. [matrix.itasoftware.com](http://matrix.itasoftware.com)

# IN THE NEXT ISSUE



Pristine, sugar-white sands and azure seas aren't a bad backdrop to a dining room. In our next issue, join us as we pull up a chair at the tables of the Caribbean's island idylls — from Jamaica to the Bahamas — and tuck in to the region's vibrant, varied cuisine

**Plus // Sarajevo, Frankfurt, Nashville, Beirut, China,  
Portugal, Botswana, Mexico City, Christchurch, Thailand**

**NOVEMBER ISSUE  
ON SALE 4 OCTOBER 2018**

*For information on our subscription offers,  
see page 176*

**FOR A MORE ORDINARY JOURNEY,  
WE RECOMMEND A MORE  
ORDINARY CRUISE LINE.**



## Farm-to-table? How about farm-to-ship?

As the official cruise line of the James Beard Foundation, we offer a culinary journey like no other, bringing local flavour on board wherever we sail. Your ship's chef shops local farmers' markets for the freshest ingredients. Hours later, you're enjoying an exquisitely prepared four-course meal at *AmphorA*, lunch alfresco at *Veranda*, or a moonlit dinner at *Candles*.

Things get even more interesting on shore, with culinary tours that let you sample the locals' favorite dishes and cooking classes taught by local chefs. And now, we're making foodies' dreams come true with tantalising food and wine-themed cruises.

## The perfect vessel for the perfect voyage

Made for relaxation, all of our ships boast gorgeous outdoor decks and a Watersports Platform that lets you jump into the ocean right off the ship. Our beautiful, ocean view staterooms and suites offer an oasis with unmatched style and special touches such as fresh fruit and flowers, and L'Occitane® bath products.

The Wind class are sleek sailing ships offering elegant outdoor spaces and a truly yacht-like experience, great for warm water destinations. The Star class consists of three identical all-suite ships with white marble bathrooms and walk-in closets, making them perfectly suited for longer stretches and every climate.

## Ready to take a cruise that's not like any other cruise?

We couldn't begin to cover everything we offer here. Contact our partners to find out more about our destinations, unique itineraries and special cruises.



**WINDSTAR**  
CRUISES  
180° FROM ORDINARY®

**When you think of cruising, it might bring to mind floating mega malls, theme parties and crowds of thousands. That's exactly what you won't get on Windstar. Ever.**

**Instead, you'll get an experience that's 180° from ordinary, on a journey that feels more like sailing on your own private yacht. It's casual luxury you won't find anywhere else at sea. So, if you don't consider yourself a cruiser, keep reading, because this just might be your cruise.**

### Smaller ships, bigger journeys

Carrying only 148-310 guests, our small ships can slip past crowds and dock in smaller ports that big cruise ships can't reach, getting you closer to those one-of-a-kind places and experiences you'll remember forever.

### Not your average itineraries

While our itineraries cover all the world's must-sees—Monaco, Bora Bora, Halong Bay—we believe what excites our guests most is the seldom-seen places we go. Tucked away ports. Secret lagoons. Pristine beaches. Know where to pull over for grilled sea scallops on a tiny Greek Isle? Or how to get to a family-run pearl farm in Tahiti? We do.

Smaller, more intimate onshore excursions take you off the beaten path, so you can get to know the authentic local culture better. This deep level of connection makes every port of call an opportunity to collect lifelong memories and expand your perspective.

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# NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC TRAVELLER'S TRAVEL WRITING COMPETITION 2018

BACK IN MARCH, WE ASKED OUR READERS TO SUBMIT A GREAT PIECE OF TRAVEL WRITING IN A BID TO DISCOVER THE VERY BEST UNTAPPED TALENT. WE'VE WHITTLED DOWN HUNDREDS OF ENTRIES TO THE TOP THREE COMPELLING TALES



**WINNER**

# UGANDA: SONGS FOR ELEPHANTS

ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF QUEEN ELIZABETH NATIONAL PARK, NIGHTLY SYMPHONIES ARE A NOVEL WAY OF KEEPING ELEPHANTS AT BAY  
WORDS: DOM TULETT

Nelson plays the drums by firelight. Isaac sits on a tree trunk bench and swings a bell with unending vigour. They carry no tune and I hear no rhythm, but still I join in, screaming my lyric: "Mouse!"

A similar stuttered symphony had kept me awake the previous night at my camp on the fringes of Uganda's Queen Elizabeth National Park. At breakfast, I asked the waiter, Barnabus, if there had been a party.

"No, sir. That night music was for the elephants, to scare them from the fields."

"Could I see that?"

"If the elephants are there tonight, we will go."

Our torches shine a trail through stony scrub, down to the village of Kikorongo. In the distance, Lake George glimmers under the moonlight, its shoreline marked with dots of golden light. The land around it is dark; safari plains that stretch to a star-lined horizon.

I'm introduced to Nelson. He's farmed this land for 22 years. His tired, bloodshot eyes flick from me to the fields, scanning for movement, as he tells me how months of drought have forced the elephants to extend their range, roaming out of the park in search of food.

I want to help, but have no instrument.

"You can shout," says Nelson.

"What should I shout?"

"Anything to scare the elephants."

We advance across patchwork fields of cassava, sweet potato and corn. The villagers blow whistles, beat sticks together. I see tracks through the dry earth, clumsy and wide, where the plants have been trampled and lost. The tough conditions affect every species — this harvest is more important than most. Nelson resumes his drum beat and I shout the most intimidating cry that comes to mind: "Mouse! Mouse!"

Urgent chatter tells us elephants are close. We increase our tempo, raise our volume. Animal numbers are recovering after rampant poaching in the Idi Amin years; the villagers know large wildlife populations attract tourists, boosting the local economy. They wish no harm on the elephants. Night music is the best deterrent.

Children pass around bunches of tiny bananas. A woman carries a flaming torch, and by its light I can see our audience, their

hulking bodies lumbering towards the fields. Nelson ups the intensity of his drumming. Isaac's bell-ringing reaches a frenzy. Whistles and sticks. The chorus swells — *accelerando! Forte!* "Mouse!"

We stay until dawn drives a wedge under the eastern night and news comes that the elephants have retreated to the park. Nelson shakes my hand. His eyes are brighter now. He laughs as we part, "Goodnight, Mouse."

On my final night at Kikorongo, I hear the night music again. I think of Nelson, his challenges, his solutions, and silently wish him well before drifting off to sleep.

In the morning, I see Barnabus again. "More elephants last night?" I ask.

"No, sir. Last night there were no elephants. They have moved to a different area." He straightens my coffee cup, fills it to the brim and grins, "We had a party to celebrate."

## JUDGES' verdict

Pat Riddell, editor of *National Geographic Traveller*, said: "Dom's entry stood out for the immediacy of his prose. We're swiftly drawn into the moment with an element of mystery. Dom then deftly maintains a sense of place and the narrative arc without wasting any words. The subject itself is unusual and interesting, and although the story is a simple one, it leaves a lasting impression."

## WINNING PRIZE

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RUNNER-UP

## COSTA RICA: IN SEARCH OF THE QUETZAL

IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR THIS ELUSIVE BIRD DEEP IN THE CLOUD FOREST, YOU'LL NEED LUCK ON YOUR SIDE. WORDS: GAVIN GREENE

It's early, far too early, and the sun is just breaking through the canopy, its silky beams casting a dappled pattern on the forest floor. I'm here to spot the quetzal, an iridescent little bird that lives in the cloud forests of Central America, and is notoriously difficult to find. People travel from all over the world to search for the quetzal; many leave without even hearing its distinctive call.

The Monteverde Cloud Forest nestles 4,500ft above sea level on the Costa Rican Continental Divide. Moisture from clouds gathers on leaves, beads along mossy vines and falls to the forest floor. Orchids tangle around an algae-encrusted bench, ferns splay from every nook and butterflies dance between flowers. I've arrived in the forest as it's waking up with a crescendo of whistling

birds, chirping insects and creaking branches. When you imagine a jungle, you imagine something that looks like the Monteverde Cloud Forest. I'm joined by Adrian, a local ornithologist. A short, weathered man in his 50s, he's lived in Monteverde his whole life. Not long after setting off into the undergrowth, he stops abruptly and starts scraping the ground with his boot, deftly extracting a shiny brown bean from a spiky pod. He presses it into my palm; without its good fortune, he says, we'll never see the quetzal.

We trek deeper into the forest, surrounded by the sound of dripping as cloud turns to droplets of water. I wipe condensation from my camera lens, scanning the trees for signs of the quetzal. Often, we hear a crack of a twig that's not caused by our boots. The

quetzal shares its home with all manner of creatures, from snakes and sloths to tapirs and monkeys, and we've no idea how many pairs of eyes are watching our slow progress through the undergrowth.

After a few hours, Adrian stops at a clearing. His eyes narrow and he holds up a hand to silence me. Then I hear it: a barely audible whistle from a cluster of trees ahead, the call rising and falling, answered moments later from further into the forest. Then it falls silent. Minutes later, we hear it again, this time behind us, echoing around the treetops, then silence once more.

With a flash of red and green and a flurry of feathers, the magnificent bird swoops through the clearing, landing on a fragile branch 50ft away. It sits for a few moments, bouncing slightly with the branch and cocking its head to listen for its mate. As the quetzal rises and falls with the branch, the sunlight catches its long tail feathers, which shimmer in shades of ultramarine, turquoise and blue; a brilliant stained-glass window against the forest mist.

I'm utterly transfixed by the sight of the beautiful bird. As my hand reaches to my camera, the lucky bean drops to the forest floor and rolls under a fern frond. I lean over to pick it up, then stop, pause a moment, and leave it there for someone else to discover.

RUNNER-UP

# KYRGYZSTAN: A HAUNTING VISIT

DISCOVERING MIN-KUSH — A GHOST TOWN ONCE AT THE HEART OF THE SOVIET NUCLEAR PROGRAMME. WORDS: SOUAD MSALLEM

It's still dark as we leave the town that time forgot. Plumes of smoke rise from chimneys atop rows of faded blue wooden houses. Remnants of an era when Min-Kush was the crown jewel of the Soviet Union's nuclear programme. It's a place once so shrouded in secrecy that it didn't appear on maps. Today, the all-but-abandoned mining town seems destined to disappear from the atlas entirely.

Our taxi stops to collect one more passenger. The diminutive man, bundled up in a fur-lined leather jacket and brown ushanka-hat, climbs aboard clutching a battered suitcase; his blotchy red nose hinting at one of his preferred pastimes. "Hello!" he says, beaming and surveying us with interest.

We trundle down the winding track towards the bottom of the valley, flanked on either side by vivid orange slopes — a

splash of colour amid the grey. Mounds of coal stain patches of earth. In one field, a shipwrecked van, long since deserted by its captain, is being swallowed by the earth. Makeshift fences fashioned from scavenged junk — broken ladders, speaker cases and scrap metal — block off tranches of land from outsiders. Everything here is a throwback to 1953, the year of the town's birth.

My mind drifts to the previous day when we stumbled upon a defunct pen factory. Crumbling blue concrete walls and floor coated with a crust of bird droppings, the skeleton space dotted with mysterious mint-green machinery, chipped and rusting. At one end of the warehouse, three uniformed workers grin down at me from a Soviet mural.

"Why did you come to Min-Kush?" asks the new passenger.

"To see another side of Kyrgyzstan," I offer.

Our conversation meanders, like the road on which we're travelling. Murza is a theatre musician in a nearby town. "There's no work here any more," he laments. During the area's heyday, people were on waiting lists to work in its mines and factories. This was the promised land, salaries were often double those of elsewhere in the region.

I ask why alcohol is prevalent in this majority-Muslim country; whether it's due to the Soviet influence. "No, it's not only this; we always had our own alcohol," Murza smiles, as if he knows a secret that we don't. "We have *bozo*! I can take you to try some."

At the next town, we follow Murza through a gate into a compound of three one-story houses. A lady peeps out from behind one of the doors and, after a few words from Murza, emerges with a recycled bottle and three chintzy bowls.

Surrounded by an assortment of chairs, discarded shoes and a line of washing destined never to dry, we perch on stools and sip our *bozo*. Thick and fizzy yellow liquid coats my mouth, sliding down my throat, warming me from the inside. Snow starts to fall, my fingers are getting numb and the image of Min-Kush is etched on my mind like a coal stain. □



## READ MORE ONLINE

Head to our website to read this year's winning entries — plus those from our Travel Writing Competition 2017.  
[natgeotraveller.co.uk/  
travel-writing-competition](http://natgeotraveller.co.uk/travel-writing-competition)

# BIRD IS THE WORD

WITH WILDLIFE HOLIDAYS BOOMING, BIRDING IS GOING MAINSTREAM, AND YOU DON'T HAVE TO TRAVEL FAR TO SPOT RARE SPECIES. IN MÁLAGA'S NORTHERN MOUNTAINS AN AVIAN MIGRATORY MOTORWAY HOSTS RECORD NUMBERS. WORDS: SARAH BARRELL

**W**e're chasing raptors. Soaring somewhere above our car is a predator that's casting a mighty big shadow on the ground. I bob my head out of the window trying to train binoculars on the mystery bird, but it keeps swooping out of sight. I fancy this avian car chase must look like a scene from a Bond movie, albeit a rather tame one. Plus I've got no ID on my target: falcon, kestrel, eagle... or vulture? They're all plentiful in these parts. But before I can even utter the question, my guide, Luis, who's barely taken his eyes off the road, answers: marsh harrier.

If you want a special ops ornithologist, Luis Alberto Rodríguez is your man. This Málaga native is lightning-quick at identifying birds at impossibly long distances, even while driving a car. And if he can't see them, he'll recognise their call and, once located, aid and abet the seriously slow spotter (me) by zooming his to-the-moon-and-back-powerful telescope on the bird for you — usually whipped out of the car and assembled before I've managed to remove the lens cap of my binoculars. And what's more, he's utterly graceful in the face of such ineptitude.

Luis is a man on a mission to bring the masses to Málaga's mountains; most recently providing the expertise for a new tour offered by local guesthouse Almohalla 51, where I'm staying. "We have so many people who visit the coast in summertime,

and most of them don't know that 30 minutes from the beach there's all this nature, all these birds," he tells me.

Inland from the highways that shuttle tourists up and down the Costa del Sol is another vital artery for a rather different seasonally migrating species. Málaga's mountainous interior is a crucial breeding stop on the avian superhighway between Africa and Northern Europe, a place where you can spot record numbers of bird species (some of which never venture as far as our shores) in a remarkably small area — one of which is the marsh harrier, twice driven to extinction in the UK over the past century.

Birding has long been a British obsession, but this hobby beloved of middle-aged men in beige is moving into the mainstream. Earlier this year, the Association of Independent Tour Operators reported wildlife holidays had overtaken beach breaks in popularity, with millennials leading the charge, while a 2017 Mintel survey of Britain's hobbies found that around 32% of 16-25-year-old men have been birdwatching. And with celebrity endorsement from the likes of Blur's Damon Albarn, Elbow's Guy Garvey and DJ-presenter Alex Zane, spotting birds may well be the new rock and roll.

Far from being a wannabe ornithologist, I came to birding with an ulterior motive; for where there are abundant birds, more often than not you'll find wild

and wonderful terrain. In the name of tracking our feathered friends over the years, I've travelled to the Peruvian Amazon to join a conservation project to count rare parrots, and to the Venezuela-Colombia border, where you might see hundreds of bird species in a day but barely another tourist.

But, of course, you don't have to travel that far to glimpse birds. On the craggy coasts of the UK and Ireland, I've spotted puffins playing in the surf, and watched some of the world's largest colonies of seabirds gather to nest and breed — all while enjoying some of our country's most dramatic landscapes.

## Route of 100 Birds

The landscape certainly puts on a diverse show in this part of southern Spain, where mountains zigzag sharply away from the Med's built-up shores, giving way to wetlands, forest and otherworldly limestone karst formations. "We often see snow up here," says Luis, as we drive north of the mountain pass through Antequera's river valley — known as *el corazón de Andalucía* (the geographical 'heart' of the province). "We're just 30 miles inland but there's a huge temperature differential. It makes for an interesting diversity of species," Luis explains. In Málaga's hinterland, Luis hosts everything from all-day bird-spotting hikes to afternoons in a hide or, as we're doing, the Route

of 100 Birds. This 155-mile coastal and mountain loop virtually guarantees encounters with over 100 bird species. These range from the vast griffon vulture — with a wing span of over 9ft — to the small, but much-twisted, blue rock thrush. Luis's favourite — for its tenacity when hunting — is the compact Bonelli's eagle. "They're considered endangered in Europe but we have a higher density of Bonelli's here than anywhere else in the Mediterranean," he says.

We climb out of the valley up to El Torcal de Antequera, with its spectacular landscape of limestone karsts, piled like stacks of prehistoric pancakes. Above the tapering heights of these temple-like towers, the raptors soar. "It's just 4,260ft up but El Torcal has its own ecosystem," Luis says. When it's not blowing a gale, a trip here guarantees sightings of vultures, peregrine falcons and juvenile golden eagles that gravitate to this wild geological playground when their parents kick them out. "This is a bit of a teenage hangout," Luis grins.

Beneath Torcal's cracked limestone balconies, enormous griffon vultures circle with predatory intent. To Luis's delight, we spot a pair of Bonelli's swooping past the outlying cliffs, their distinctive black-and-white underbellies flashing in the sun. A blue ribbon of coast just visible on the distant horizon belies Torcal's Wild West vibe; raptors casting



Griffon vulture



## SPECTACULAR BIRDWATCHING DESTINATIONS

### ROMANIA

The Danube Delta's network of channels, lagoons and islands makes it an oasis for ornithologists, home to an abundance of ducks, herons, ibis, pelicans, warblers and white-tailed eagles.

### PERU

The highly biodiverse Manú National Park is home to approximately 1,025 bird species, including macaws, parrots, and the cock-of-the-rock, famed for the male's elaborate courtship dance.

### ETHIOPIA

**Ethiopia's Bale Mountains** are home to many species not found anywhere else in sub-Saharan Africa. They include the Abyssinian longclaw, eastern imperial eagle and endemic Salvadori's seedeater; Avian highlights of its namesake national park include the yellow-bellied sœur, collared sunbird and red-billed oxpecker.

### PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Home to 38 of the world's 43 birds of paradise, the mountains, rainforest and rivers of Papua New Guinea are a must-visit for serious birders.

### BHUTAN

The Himalayan country is twitcher heaven; top spots include the critically endangered rufous-necked hornbill, emerald cuckoo and chestnut-breasted partridge.



black silhouettes over its dusty canyons and crags.

Our car climbs further, snaking west through a narrowing ravine towards the Caminito del Rey, a narrow steel walkway strung along the sheer walls of the towering El Chorro canyon: a bucket list hit for hikers and landscape painters alike for its gothic-drama vistas and daredevil traverses. We stop at the canyon's Gaitanes Gorge to watch the Bonelli's wheeling hopefully above hikers' heads. They inch along what's become known as the 'walkway of death' on account of the not insignificant tally of tourist lives it's claimed.

But Luis has his eyes on the ground. He's spotted the distinctive mohican of a Thekla's lark bobbing about in the scrub. Then, through his binoculars, he spies a black wheatear sitting proud atop a boulder displaying its white tail feathers; and beyond that, a prized blue rock thrush. Nearby, the little whitewashed village of El Chorro is quietly going about its business. It's an oddly tranquil scene, given the drama above.

"Chorro means 'cascade' or 'jet,'" says Luis. "Three rivers used to converge here, forcing hundreds of tons of water through the gorge. It must have been terrifying, that much power." Powerful enough for Spain's King Alfonso XIII to initiate an ambitious hydroelectric energy project in the early 1900s, of which the Caminito del Rey once provided a service route.

Even more incongruous amid these wild mountains is Alfonso's extravagant network of elaborate bridges, tiered dams and ornate viaducts, built to harness the waters of Spain's 'lake district'. It's as though a landscaped Victorian estate has been hung just-so here in this remote hinterland. To complete the surreal scene, on the saline shores of nearby Fuente de Piedra Lagoon we find ourselves surrounded by hundreds of pink flamingos.

"A sign that summer is soon here," says Luis. "They're generally non-migratory, but flamingos don't like the cold so they'll move around. They make it as far as the Red Sea. In a few weeks, thousands will arrive here; this reserve is one of two sites in

Spain where greater flamingos breed." There's an abundance of ducks, too; the white-headed variety, once the poster child for conservation efforts here (the population declined to just two in the 1970s), and numerous red-crested pochard ducks, the males with fiery bills and matching demonic eyes, their dun-coloured mates following in their wake.

### The sound of silence

A short car ride south and the marshes seem a distant dream — we're suddenly surrounded by olive groves. I wind down the window. The silence is deafening. Row upon row of tightly packed, gnarled trees undulating across the hills as far as the eye can see. And, despite this proliferation of plants, there's not one peep from a bird. I strain my ears, train the bins, and scan the tree-carpeted terrain but neither wing nor warble can I detect.

"You won't hear a thing. It's unnerving," says Luis. "These aren't groves in the way we think of groves, as wild and natural. This is an olive factory." In fact, the olives here are so intensively farmed that they represent a



We stop at the canyon's Gaitanes Gorge to watch the Bonelli's eagles wheeling hopefully above hikers' heads as they inch along what's become known as the 'walkway of death'

manicured, mono-crop landscape where no weed or insect is permitted, and round-the-clock irrigation sucks the water table dry — creating erosion that causes pesticides to leach into lakes and rivers — and leaves villages thirsty; a silent oil war.

After an eerie, quiet drive, the olives are finally behind us, replaced by green fields of wheat. Birds and bugs dart around outside the car, the air suddenly returned to life. We soon spot a crested lark, common kestrel, and those majestic harriers once again cutting arcs across the sky. "Birds love all those grassy insects and micro organisms," beams Luis. I hear a call that takes me back to being a child. "Corn buntings!" says Luis. "They were almost gone in the UK at one point, I think." Like harriers, corn buntings are a late-nesting species whose eggs and fledglings are often destroyed during harvesting. "I work with local farmers here to protect nests, notably those of the Montagu's harrier, which are suffering from the wheat fields being lost to olives," says Luis. "Where wheat remains, we plot their nesting

sites, which they return to each year, and farmers cut wide of these plots."

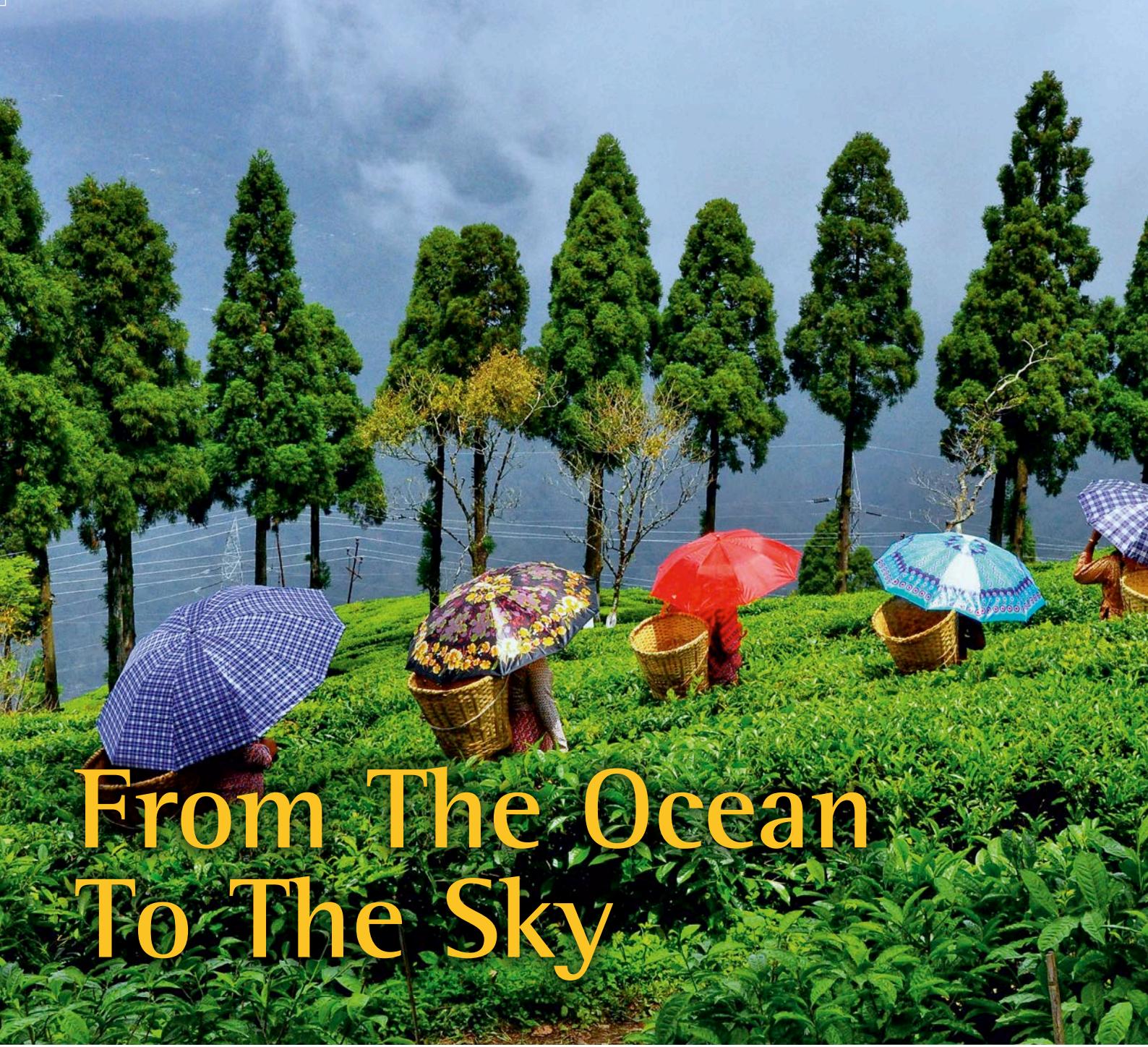
Conservation and cultivation go hand in hand, too, at the Cortijo la Samiaja estate, just outside the hilltop village of Archidona, where I end the day amid some inspiring olive groves. I've snagged a tour of Samiaja to conclude my day's birding, complete with a tasting of its award-winning olive oil.

As dusk finally starts to fall across the valley, birdsong reaches fever pitch: nightingales and azure-winged magpies call loudly from the elm, ash and poplar trees and the stands of ancient holm oak that still carpet Archidona's hillsides. "There are owls if we listen carefully," says Samiaja's María-Jesús. "You can see them at dusk too, so keep watching. There's plenty for them to feed on." Samiaja's groves are all organic, from seed to soil. The harvest is over but a few olives remain on the trees. "We hand pick and leave some of them on the tree. It's better for the tree, for the environment," says María-Jesús. "And definitely better for the birds." □

## MORE INFO

Almohalla 51's three-night birding package starts from €390 (£342) for two. It includes B&B accommodation, a half-day birding tour with transfers and a birding guidebook. Available March–May (excluding Easter), and September–November. Excludes flights. [almohalla51.com](http://almohalla51.com)

ABOVE, FROM LEFT:  
Kestrel; olive groves  
near Úbeda



# From The Ocean To The Sky

Bengal — the only Indian state that stretches from the mountains to the sea — has five distinct climatic regions, culture, cuisine, and a wide spectrum of natural beauty.

The title of Mountaineer Sir Edmund Hillary's 1977 expedition *From the Ocean to the Sky* — which concluded in Bengal — perfectly captures the diversity of the region's landscape. On the southern coast, the tree-fringed beaches of Medinipur and the mangrove delta of the Sundarbans lie under a sultry tropical sky. While in the north, the tranquil foothills of the Himalayas offer views of snow-capped Kanchenjunga, visible from over 60 miles away.

In between the two extremes lie other diverse experiences. In the south west part of the state is the red soil of the Manbhum region, where the arid browns of summer are lit up by firebursts of red *polash* flowers (which Kipling called flame-of-the-forest) and

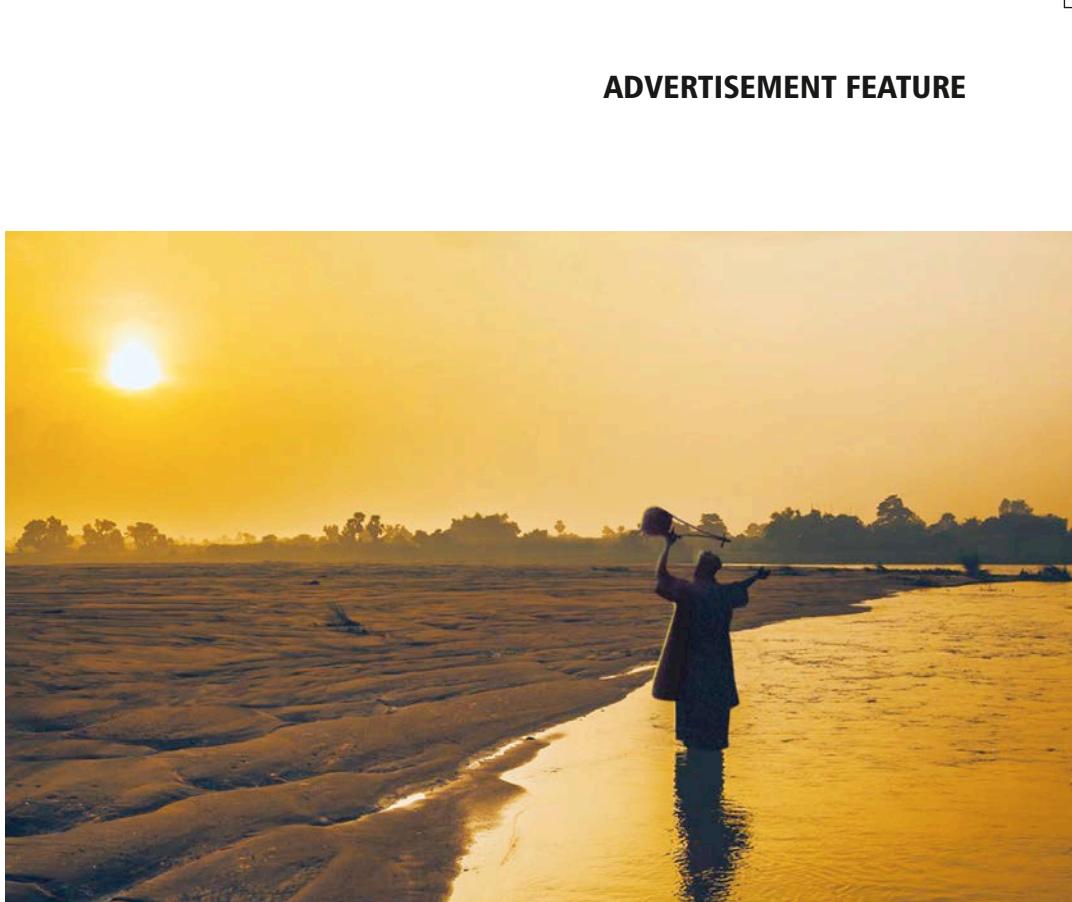
the crisp winter nights are enlivened by *Baul* songs. There, the forested hills of Ajodhya and Susunia offer hiking routes and secluded waterfalls amid the rocks. Further north and east lie lush green plains, the palaces of the erstwhile *zamindari* (landed gentry) families, and the *Bhatiyali* folk songs of the boatmen as they steer their boats across rivers so wide that the opposite bank may be lost beyond the horizon.

Travellers should drive north at a leisurely pace, stopping to take in the sights and savour the local cuisine. Every highway in the Bengal has shops that offer a taste of the local sweets, whether it's *mecha sandesh* from Bankura, *lyangcha* in Shaktigarh or Murshidabad's famous *kheermohan*. Thanks to the initiative of the Honourable Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, there are *Patha Sathis* (travellers' rest areas) dotting the highways, offering clean restrooms and

wholesome food. The drive could be the beginning of a longer romance with the essence of Bengal — who can resist a good road story?

Past Farakka, the landscape changes. Beyond Dinajpur lie the welcoming tea gardens and the gentler rhythms of life in the Dooars. Green expanses lined with shade trees, gurgling mountain streams and shaggy forests form the picture-perfect landscape of this territory. The roads are punctuated by sleepy hamlets — Samsing, Suntaleykhola, Jhalong, Latpanchar — surrounded by nature at its pristine best, quiet getaways far from the madding crowd. The dense forests are home to leopards, bison, elephants and rhinos. (Recently, wildlife experts have been surprised by signs that the tiger has returned).

And farthest north lie the hills, the green Himalayan foothills that rise and rise



above the Rangit and the Teesta till they touch the clouds. Unparalleled scenic beauty, with dense alpine forests, meandering rivers and mesmerising views of snow-capped mountains that seem close enough to touch. Beyond the better-known towns – Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Kurseong, Labha, Ghoom – trekking is a great way to explore this region and the Singalila range that stretches from North Bengal through Sikkim, offers breathtaking panoramic trekking routes.

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The natural and cultural surroundings have inspired four unique dining experiences. With the iconic rock fortress of Sigiriya in the distance, Apsara restaurant offers fine dining overlooking a tranquil lake, with set menus offering world cuisines to suit different tastes. Sulang is a more casual cafe, and ideal to enjoy light refreshments amid the cool breeze. The Graffiti Bar allows guests to unwind — a tropical cocktail is the perfect way to end a day of exploring the Cultural Triangle. The seven distinct Signature Dining experiences, including the spa and treehouse, provide a more personalised atmosphere.

In its wonderfully idyllic setting, the Island Spa offers a range of spa treatments to rejuvenate mind, body and soul, as well as a swimming pool and an ultra-modern gym equipped to promote wellness and overall harmony.

On top of all that, the 28 acres of man-made wetlands are home to a fantastic variety of birds, mammals and plants. The hotel's distinctive habitats paved the way for the protection of endangered species, and have even acted as a base for research.

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# Inbox

Readers, this is your space. Let us know what you think about the magazine, give us your unique travel tips, or simply ask us a question. Get Instagramming, emailing or tweeting!

## GET IN TOUCH

 [inbox@natgeotraveller.co.uk](mailto:inbox@natgeotraveller.co.uk)



## Win

Next issue's star letter wins a luxury leather travel bundle from David Hampton worth £180!

Bring a touch of luxury to your travels with David Hampton's large cosmetic case, Britannia passport case and luggage tag in red, made from handcrafted luxury soft leather. Embossed with the Union Jack as a nod to British heritage, the high-quality accessories are the perfect holiday companion for your next adventure. [davidhampton.com](http://davidhampton.com)



## ★ STAR LETTER

### New heights

Your Bhutan article (Trips of a Lifetime, Jul/Aug 2018) reminded me of a spectacularly steep climb in the Himalayas this spring. After a prolonged period in the sun, I took a break. Sitting on a precarious cliff face, I saw a man coming towards me carrying a cone-shaped basket, while his wife and teenage daughter, each carrying a basket of food and provisions, came along behind. I looked at the man more closely as he passed and what I saw truly moved me. There was no food or water in his basket; he was carrying a frail older man who obviously couldn't walk. It was such a touching moment — I wiped away the tears just in time to take a photo. **PRADIP MISTRY**



## Chat back

  NatGeoTravelUK

What's your all-time wildlife experience in #India? Whether it's safari or scuba, we want to hear all about it. **#NGTUK**

**@ETTA\_TALWAR** Ranthambore National Park ticked all the boxes of the ultimate wildlife experience. Within five minutes of entering the park, we spotted Royal Bengal tigers and followed them for 45 minutes and ended our trip admiring a beautiful resting leopard

## Plain sailing

Inspired by the article All at Sea: A Greek Odyssey (Jul/Aug 2018), we embarked on our own Greek odyssey. Not being able to afford the luxury of *SeaDream 1*, we embraced the Greek ferry system, which may not have been as comfortable or reliable, but was every bit as entertaining. We visited Santorini and dined over the caldera, bathed in the harbour with the locals in Naxos, swam off the tiny island of Schinoussa and stayed in an old farmhouse at the peak of Syros, with a 350-degree view over the town to the sea below. Our trip may not have been steeped in luxury, but it was every bit a real Greek odyssey. **FIONA BROWN**

## Mad for Madeira

On reading the results of your Big Sleep Awards 2018 (and last year too), I'm pleased to see that Madeira is represented by the Belmond Reid's Palace, runner-up in the Euro Star category. However, just a short walk away is the Cliff Bay Hotel, and it's amazing. Truly deserving of many awards in many categories: luxury, exceptional service, top-class facilities, comfort (the most amazing beds I've ever slept in) and a truly spectacular view over the Atlantic. It's also home to the island's only two-Michelin-starred restaurant, Il Gallo D'Oro. Perfection in paradise. Madeira — the most memorable of all my holidays. **JANICE PARKER**



# Your pictures

**Every issue, we highlight the best photography that you've shared with us on Instagram using #NGTUK. From Scotland to South Georgia, these are a few of our favourites from the feed this month**



1 @sarahrabajalee  
Market in Myanmar

2 @poetic\_mouse  
The remote islands of St Kilda, off the north-west coast of Scotland

3 @wanderlustchloe  
Trullo houses in Alberobello, Puglia

4 @kellienetherwood  
Elephant seals in Gold Harbour, South Georgia

5 @smsidat737  
The beautiful harbour of Nyhavn in Copenhagen, Denmark

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